



# Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS

TUESDAY — 12 APR 2022



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**Events, Opportunities**

HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Russia economy faces big contraction</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-revises-forecasts-gdp-fall-more-than-10-2022-ria-cites-official-2022-04-12/">https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-revises-forecasts-gdp-fall-more-than-10-2022-ria-cites-official-2022-04-12/</a>
GIST	<p>April 12 (Reuters) - Russia's economy is on track to contract by more than 10% in 2022, the biggest fall in gross domestic product since the years following the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, former finance minister Alexei Kudrin said on Tuesday.</p> <p>Russia is facing soaring inflation and capital flight while grappling with a possible debt default after the West imposed crippling sanctions to punish President Vladimir Putin for sending tens of thousands of troops to Ukraine on Feb. 24.</p> <p>Russia's economy and finance ministries are currently working on new forecasts, RIA state news agency quoted Kudrin, who now serves as head of the Audit Chamber, as saying.</p> <p>"The official forecast would be for more than around a 10% contraction," said Kudrin, who served as Putin's finance minister from 2000 to 2011, according to RIA.</p> <p>Previous Russian government forecasts envisaged gross domestic product growth of 3% this year after the economy expanded by 4.7% in 2021.</p> <p>A source close to the Russian government who spoke on condition of anonymity told Reuters that the economy ministry projects a GDP contraction of between 10% and 15% this year.</p> <p>A contraction of 10% would amount to the biggest decline in gross domestic product since 1994, according to World Bank and International Monetary Fund data.</p> <p>The World Bank this month forecast Russian GDP output would fall 11.2% this year. <a href="#">read more</a></p> <p>Analysts polled by Reuters in late March had on average forecast 2022 GDP contraction at 7.3%, predicting a pick up in inflation to nearly 24%, its highest since 1999.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Putin warns: Russia cannot be held back</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/putin-warns-west/2022/04/12/id/1065341/">https://www.newsmax.com/world/globaltalk/putin-warns-west/2022/04/12/id/1065341/</a>
GIST	<p>President Vladimir Putin warned the West on Tuesday that attempts to isolate Moscow would fail, citing the success of the Soviet space program as evidence that Russia could achieve spectacular leaps forward in tough conditions.</p> <p>Russia says it will never again depend on the West after the United States and its allies imposed crippling sanctions on it to punish Putin for his Feb. 24 order for what he called a "special military operation" in Ukraine.</p> <p>Sixty one years to the day since the Soviet Union's Yuri Gagarin blasted off into the history books by becoming the first man in space, Putin traveled to the Vostochny Cosmodrome in Russia's Far East, 3,450 miles (5550 km) east of Moscow.</p> <p>"The sanctions were total, the isolation was complete but the Soviet Union was still first in space," Putin said, according to Russian state television.</p> <p>"We don't intend to be isolated," Putin said. "It is impossible to severely isolate anyone in the modern world - especially such a vast country as Russia."</p> <p>Russia's Cold War space successes such as Gagarin's flight and the 1957 launch of Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite from earth, have a particular pertinence for Russia: both events shocked the United</p>

States. The launch of Sputnik 1 prompted the United States to create NASA in a bid to catch up with Moscow.

Putin says the "special military operation" in Ukraine is necessary because the United States was using Ukraine to threaten Russia - including via the NATO military alliance - and that Moscow had to defend Russian-speaking people in Ukraine from persecution.

He said on Tuesday that he had no doubts Russia would achieve all of its objectives in Ukraine - a conflict he cast as both inevitable and essential to defend Russia in the long term.

"Its goals are absolutely clear and noble," Putin said. "It's clear that we didn't have a choice. It was the right decision."

Ukrainian forces have mounted stiff resistance and the West has imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia in an effort to force it to withdraw its forces.

Russia's economy is on track to contract by more than 10% in 2022, the biggest fall in gross domestic product since the years following the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, former finance minister Alexei Kudrin said on Tuesday.

Putin toured the space port in Russia's far east with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

"Why an earth are we getting so worried about these sanctions?" Lukashenko said, according to Russian state television.

Lukashenko, who has a track record of sometimes saying things that appear to jar with his closest ally's stated positions on a range of issues, has insisted that Belarus must be involved in negotiations to resolve the conflict in Ukraine and has said that Belarus had been unfairly labeled "an accomplice of the aggressor."

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Russia war worsens fertilizer crunch</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-health-europe-c6a2d11380d3cb0c48d4c22703d1954e">https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-business-health-europe-c6a2d11380d3cb0c48d4c22703d1954e</a>
GIST	<p>KIAMBU COUNTY, Kenya (AP) — Monica Kariuki is about ready to give up on farming. What is driving her off her 10 acres of land outside Nairobi isn't bad weather, pests or blight — the traditional agricultural curses — but fertilizer: It costs too much.</p> <p>Despite thousands of miles separating her from the <a href="#">battlefields of Ukraine</a>, Kariuki and her cabbage, corn and spinach farm are indirect victims of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion. The war has <a href="#">pushed up the price of natural gas</a>, a key ingredient in fertilizer, and has led to severe sanctions against Russia, a major exporter of fertilizer.</p> <p>Kariuki used to spend 20,000 Kenyan shillings, or about \$175, to fertilize her entire farm. Now, she would need to spend five times as much. Continuing to work the land, she said, would yield nothing but losses.</p> <p>"I cannot continue with the farming business. I am quitting farming to try something else," she said.</p> <p>Higher fertilizer prices are making the <a href="#">world's food supply more expensive</a> and less abundant, as farmers skimp on nutrients for their crops and get lower yields. While the <a href="#">ripples will be felt</a> by grocery shoppers in wealthy countries, the squeeze on food supplies will land hardest on families in poorer countries. It could hardly come at a worse time: The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said last week that its world food-price index in March reached the highest level since it started in 1990.</p>

The fertilizer crunch threatens to further limit worldwide food supplies, already constrained by the disruption of crucial grain shipments from Ukraine and Russia. The loss of those affordable supplies of wheat, barley and other grains raises the prospect of food shortages and political instability in Middle Eastern, African and some Asian countries where millions rely on subsidized bread and cheap noodles.

“Food prices will skyrocket because farmers will have to make profit, so what happens to consumers?” said Uche Anyanwu, an agricultural expert at the University of Nigeria.

The aid group Action Aid warns that families in the Horn of Africa are already being driven “to the brink of survival.”

The U.N. says Russia is the world’s No. 1 exporter of nitrogen fertilizer and No. 2 in phosphorus and potassium fertilizers. Its ally Belarus, also contending with Western sanctions, is another major fertilizer producer.

Many developing countries — including Mongolia, Honduras, Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, Mexico and Guatemala — rely on Russia for at least a fifth of their imports.

The conflict also has driven up the already-exorbitant price of natural gas, used to make nitrogen fertilizer. The result: European energy prices so high that some fertilizer companies “have closed their businesses and stopped operating their plants,” said David Laborde, a researcher at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

For corn and cabbage farmer Jackson Koeth, 55, of Eldoret in western Kenya, the conflict in Ukraine was distant and puzzling until he had to decide whether to go ahead with the planting season. Fertilizer prices had doubled from last year.

Koeth said he decided to keep planting but only on half the acreage of years past. Yet he doubts he can make a profit with fertilizer so costly.

Greek farmer Dimitris Filis, who grows olives, oranges and lemons, said “you have to search to find” ammonia nitrate and that the cost of fertilizing a 10-hectare (25-acre) olive grove has doubled to 560 euros (\$310). While selling his wares at an Athens farm market, he said most farmers plan to skip fertilizing their olive and orange groves this year.

“Many people will not use fertilizers at all, and this as a result, lowers the quality of the production and the production itself, and slowly, slowly at one point, they won’t be able to farm their land because there will be no income,” Filis said.

In China, the price of potash — potassium-rich salt used as fertilizer — is up 86% from a year earlier. Nitrogen fertilizer prices have climbed 39% and phosphorus fertilizer is up 10%.

In the eastern Chinese city of Tai’an, the manager of a 35-family cooperative that raises wheat and corn said fertilizer prices have jumped 40% since the start of the year.

“We can hardly make any money,” said the manager, who would give only his surname, Zhao.

Terry Farms, which grows produce on 2,100 acres largely in Ventura, California, has seen prices of some fertilizer formulations double; others are up 20%. Shifting fertilizers is risky, vice president William Terry said, because cheaper versions might not give “the crop what it needs as a food source.”

As the growing season approaches in Maine, potato farmers are grappling with a 70% to 100% increase in fertilizer prices from last year, depending on the blend.

“I think it’s going to be a pretty expensive crop, no matter what you’re putting in the ground, from fertilizer to fuel, labor, electrical and everything else,” said Donald Flannery, executive director of the Maine Potato Board.

In Prudentopolis, a town in Brazil’s Parana state, farmer Edimilson Rickli showed off a warehouse that would normally be packed with fertilizer bags but has only enough to last a few more weeks. He’s worried that, with the war in Ukraine showing no sign of letting up, he’ll have to go without fertilizer when he plants wheat, barley and oats next month.

“The question is: Where Brazil is going to buy more fertilizer from?” he said. “We have to find other markets.”

Other countries are hoping to help fill the gaps. Nigeria, for example, opened Africa’s largest fertilizer factory last month, and the \$2.5 billion plant has already shipped fertilizer to the United States, Brazil, India and Mexico.

India, meanwhile, is seeking more fertilizer imports from Israel, Oman, Canada and Saudi Arabia to make up for lost shipments from Russia and Belarus.

“If the supply shortage gets worse, we will produce less,” said Kishor Rungta of the nonprofit Fertiliser Association of India. “That’s why we need to look for options to get more fertilizers in the country.”

Agricultural firms are providing support for farmers, especially in Africa where poverty often limits access to vital farm inputs. In Kenya, Apollo Agriculture is helping farmers get fertilizer and access to finance.

“Some farmers are skipping the planting season and others are going into some other ventures such as buying goats to cope,” said Benjamin Njenga, co-founder of the firm. “So these support services go a long way for them.”

Governments are helping, too. The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced last month that it was issuing \$250 million in grants to support U.S. fertilizer production. The Swiss government has released part of its nitrogen fertilizer reserves.

Still, there’s no easy answer to the double whammy of higher fertilizer prices and limited supplies. The next 12 to 18 months, food researcher LaBorde said, “will be difficult.”

The market already was “super, super tight” before the war, said Kathy Mathers of the Fertilizer Institute trade group.

“Unfortunately, in many cases, growers are just happy to get fertilizer at all,” she said.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Skyrocketing airfares not slowing travelers</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.fox5ny.com/news/skyrocketing-airfares-not-slowing-travelers">https://www.fox5ny.com/news/skyrocketing-airfares-not-slowing-travelers</a>
GIST	<p><b>NEWARK, N.J.</b> - Airline ticket prices are sky-high and are only getting higher with spring break <a href="#">travel</a> and a jump in the cost of jet fuel. Ticket prices are 40% more expensive than they were in January. Estimates show that it will be up 76% this summer.</p> <p>Right now, domestic airfare costs \$330 on average per round trip. Travel website Hopper was not expecting the U.S. air <a href="#">travel market</a> to hit that number until June. Now Hopper says to expect a 10% increase to \$360 this summer.</p> <p>"In the near-term, we expect prices to remain at ~\$320-\$330/round-trip until the end of April, before rising 10% through May to \$360/round-trip," Hopper said in its latest <a href="#">Consumer Airfare Index Report</a>. Following June, airfare should seasonally decline into the fall shoulder season.</p>

	<p>Americans are already paying way more than they're used to. Ticket prices are near a 10-year high. But that isn't slowing travelers down. In fact, <a href="#">travelers</a> are outpacing supply in some instances.</p> <p>JetBlue has announced it will reduce the number of trips it flies this summer because it can't keep up with staffing all its flights. The airline canceled more than 300 flights this past weekend.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Airports clogged as travel rebound strains</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/airports-clogged-with-queues-as-travel-rebound-strains-resources/ar-AAW7hXz">https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/other/airports-clogged-with-queues-as-travel-rebound-strains-resources/ar-AAW7hXz</a>
GIST	<p>(Bloomberg) -- Understaffed airports and airlines from Australia to Europe are struggling to cope with a fresh rush of travelers, with long queues and flight disruptions expected to persist as the busy Easter weekend approaches.</p> <p>Passengers checking in at Sydney Airport this week have waited for hours in queues snaking outside terminals. Staff absences are running as high as 50% at Qantas Airways Ltd., while the airport's workforce is little more than half its normal size. The U.K. has also been hit by disruptions and flight cancellations.</p> <p>The aviation industry axed hundreds of thousands of workers to get through the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic. That left airports and airlines short of staff to handle an upswing in travel as much of the world drops entry restrictions, while the virus continues to ripple through flight crews and ground workers.</p> <p>Sydney Airport, Australia's international gateway, has called the combination of factors a "perfect storm."</p> <p>"We just can't get staff," Sydney Airport Chief Executive Officer Geoff Culbert said on Australian television Tuesday. "It's going to be like this for a little while."</p> <p>Culbert said on some days the airport can find itself running at 60% staff capacity while having to process more than 80% of pre-Covid passenger volumes. "The maths leads you to where we are," he said.</p> <p>Ahead of the Easter holiday, there's already nowhere to park at Sydney Airport for those taking a domestic flight.</p> <p>The rebound in some major markets including the U.S. has caught airlines and airports on the hop. Smaller markets such as Thailand and Singapore that are yet to reopen to the same degree aren't seeing the same delays.</p> <p>U.S. airports are "chock-a-block" with travelers, AirAsia Group Bhd founder Tony Fernandes said in an interview from New York with Bloomberg Television on Tuesday. He said a similar recovery in air travel in Asia, where restrictions in places such as China remain, was still a few months away.</p> <p>U.K. holidaymakers face lengthy queues this week. Almost 4.2 million travelers passed through London's Heathrow Airport in March, a more than sevenfold jump from a year earlier. Border Force staff from Scotland and Northern Ireland are being deployed to help mitigate queues at the airport, which is racing to hire 12,000 new workers after the U.K. lifted curbs on travel.</p> <p>Low-cost carrier EasyJet Plc and British Airways Plc both canceled flights Sunday. The same day, one third of EasyJet services were delayed, according to tracking site FlightAware.</p> <p>JetBlue Airways Corp. is planning to reduce its summer schedule to avoid flight disruptions due to staff shortages, CNBC reported Sunday. The U.S. airline is offering flight attendants \$1,000 bonuses if they don't miss work from Friday through the end of May, CNBC said.</p>



	<p>Qantas has asked unrostered pilots to join three international flights and several domestic services on Wednesday that are critically short of crew, the Sydney Morning Herald reported, citing an internal note from the airline.</p> <p>Qantas CEO Alan Joyce said Monday that staff absences were running at between 20% and 50% due to Covid infections or isolation requirements.</p> <p>He said delays were exacerbated because passengers have forgotten what they need to do when they fly.</p> <p>Sydney Airport security is rescreening 30% of travelers because they're forgetting to remove items like laptops and aerosols from their bags, Joyce said. Before the pandemic the figure was 10%, he said.</p> <p>"We're all rusty," Joyce said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 WHO analyzes new Covid subvariants</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://nationalpost.com/news/who-says-it-is-analyzing-two-new-omicron-covid-sub-variants">https://nationalpost.com/news/who-says-it-is-analyzing-two-new-omicron-covid-sub-variants</a>
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization said on Monday it is tracking a few dozen cases of two new sub-variants of the highly transmissible Omicron strain of the coronavirus to assess whether they are more infectious or dangerous.</p> <p>It has added BA.4 and BA.5, sister variants of the original BA.1 Omicron variant, to its list for monitoring. It is already tracking BA.1 and BA.2 — now globally dominant — as well as BA.1.1 and BA.3.</p> <p>The WHO said it had begun tracking them because of their “additional mutations that need to be further studied to understand their impact on immune escape potential.”</p> <p>Viruses mutate all the time but only some mutations affect their ability to spread or evade prior immunity from vaccination or infection, or the severity of disease they cause.</p> <p>For instance, BA.2 now represents nearly 94% of all sequenced cases and is more transmissible than its siblings, but the evidence so far suggests it is no more likely to cause severe disease.</p> <p>Only a few dozen cases of BA.4 and BA.5 have been reported to the global GISAID database, according to WHO.</p> <p>The UK's Health Security Agency said last week BA.4 had been found in South Africa, Denmark, Botswana, Scotland and England from Jan. 10 to March 30.</p> <p>All the BA.5 cases were in South Africa as of last week, but on Monday Botswana's health ministry said it had identified four cases of BA.4 and BA.5, all among people aged 30 to 50 who were fully vaccinated and experiencing mild symptoms.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Russian troops took Chernobyl souvenirs?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx99w/ukraine-russia-soldiers-chernobyl">https://www.vice.com/en/article/epx99w/ukraine-russia-soldiers-chernobyl</a>
GIST	<p>Russian troops have looted lethally radioactive material from two laboratories in Chernobyl after fleeing the site at the end of March, according to the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>“The occupants have stolen and destroyed 133 sources with a total activity of about 7 million becquerels [a unit of radioactivity],” <a href="#">a post</a> by the State Agency of Ukraine on Exclusion Zone Management said on Saturday. “Even a fraction of this activity is lethal if handled unprofessionally or uncontrollably.”</p> <p>Days after the initial invasion of Ukraine, Russian troops attacking from Belarus seized Chernobyl, the site of a highly radioactive explosion in 1986.</p>

	<p>During Russia’s monthlong occupation of the Chernobyl site, Russian troops forced employees taken hostage to work with little sleep and without adequate food, putting the site at risk.</p> <p>Russian soldiers also drove armoured vehicles without radioactive protection through the “Red Forest” —a radioactive zone—<a href="#">kicking up radioactive dust</a>.</p> <p>However, on March 31, most Russian troops were reported to have left the site as part of a wider retreat after Russia had <a href="#">struggled to execute its invasion plan</a>.</p> <p>According to the government office, the two laboratories damaged by Russian troops in Chernobyl were established to investigate the impact of radioactive materials.</p> <p>“Computers and office equipment were taken away, and laboratory equipment and measuring devices were broken or destroyed,” the post read.</p> <p>Officials are now working to determine the impact of Russia’s damage to the site.</p> <p>“The level of containment and safety of calibration dumps and radioactive contaminated fluids cannot be determined,” it said, “and the status of contaminated substances will be clarified after appropriate inventories and measurements have been made.”</p> <p>The location or potential impact of the looted objects is unknown.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Canada: legally buy pure cheap fentanyl</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/4awm9d/vancouver-fentanyl-portland-hotel-society">https://www.vice.com/en/article/4awm9d/vancouver-fentanyl-portland-hotel-society</a>
GIST	<p>A harm-reduction organization in Vancouver is helping people addicted to opioids buy pharmaceutical-grade fentanyl at street prices as an alternative to the illicit drug supply—a first in North America.</p> <p>As first reported by <a href="#">the Globe and Mail</a>, Portland Hotel Society launched its “enhanced access program” last week. The program connects people who buy illicit opioids with a nurse who helps them determine a fentanyl prescription and dosage that will suit their needs. Then the patients can purchase powder fentanyl capsules at one of the Portland Hotel Society’s clinical sites.</p> <p>The cost is \$10 for one-tenth of a gram—which is called a “point” on the street and goes for the same price.</p> <p>Dr. Christy Sutherland, medical director at Portland Hotel Society, told the <i>Globe</i> it seems “very strange” that she is coordinating fentanyl sales as a family doctor.</p> <p>“But then, how many overdoses do you need to do before this is the program that you launch?” she added.</p> <p>VICE World News has reached out to Portland Hotel Society for comment but has not yet received a response.</p> <p>British Columbia declared the overdose crisis a public health emergency in 2016. Since then, more than 8,500 people have died of drug overdoses, with last year being the deadliest on record.</p> <p>The province already has prescription heroin and <a href="#">fentanyl replacement programs</a> for people who are addicted to opioids. Some drug users told VICE World News that because fentanyl is the dominant street opioid, prescription heroin and other medical alternatives are not enough to keep their withdrawal and cravings at bay. <a href="#">Potent benzodiazepines</a>, or tranquilizers, are now further contaminating the illicit fentanyl supply, causing more complicated overdoses.</p>



	<p>The fentanyl powder capsules being sold via Portland Hotel Society can be used to smoke, snort, or inject, the <i>Globe</i> reports. They are cut with sugar and caffeine.</p> <p>Last month, the Canadian government <a href="#">announced</a> \$3.5 million in funding to safe supply projects in Vancouver, Victoria, and Toronto. However, harm reduction proponents have told VICE World News the programs aren't meeting demand.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Shanghai zero deaths spurs skepticism</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/04/implausible-zero-deaths-in-shanghais-covid-spike-spurs-skepticism/">https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/04/implausible-zero-deaths-in-shanghais-covid-spike-spurs-skepticism/</a>
GIST	<p>Shanghai and more than a dozen other cities in China are now under full or partial lockdown as the country faces its most significant spike of COVID-19 cases yet in the pandemic. But amid rapid increases in cases from the ultratransmissible omicron variant and <a href="#">China's relatively low vaccination rate among its elderly</a>, some experts are left scratching their heads over the lack of reported deaths.</p> <p>In Shanghai, a city of around 26 million that functions as the country's financial hub, residents' patience has run out as they enter a second week of full, draconian lockdown. Videos have circulated online of people <a href="#">screaming from their apartments</a> and berating officials over food shortages. There are reports of people being denied medical care and forced into crowded quarantine facilities. At the beginning of lockdowns, officials were widely criticized for separating parents from young children, including breastfeeding infants.</p> <p>China reported more than 200,000 infections in Shanghai since the outbreak began last month. The vast majority of those are said to be mild or asymptomatic. So far, Chinese officials have reported that only one case in the city has been considered severe, and no deaths from COVID-19 have been reported.</p> <p>That's despite China failing to reach high levels of vaccination among its elderly population, who are the most at risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19. Only about half of people ages 80 and above in China have been fully vaccinated, and even fewer have received booster doses. Earlier this year, Hong Kong, which had similarly low vaccination rates among its older adults, saw an equally severe spike in omicron cases and recorded one of the highest daily death rates in the world.</p> <p>In <a href="#">an interview Monday on CNBC's Squawk Box</a>, Scott Gottlieb, former US Food and Drug Administration commissioner and current Pfizer board member, expressed skepticism about China's reported numbers. "It appears that they've lost control of this [outbreak] in Shanghai. There's many more infections than what's being reported," he said. "The data coming out of there is implausible. They claim... only one severe case and no deaths—we know that's not true."</p> <p>Gottlieb pointed to previous reporting from The Wall Street Journal and others of outbreaks in elder-care hospitals resulting in scores of fatalities. One hospital worker who spoke with the WSJ last month recalled seeing half a dozen hearses parked at the hospital's gate at night. "I was scared to death. I said, 'Look, look, those are for dead bodies,'" the worker told the newspaper. Shanghai has 4 million residents over 65, making its population one of the oldest in China, the WSJ noted.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Concern: Russia chemical weapons use?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2022-04-11/reports-of-russian-chemical-weapons-use-in-ukraine-deeply-concerning-pentagon-says">https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2022-04-11/reports-of-russian-chemical-weapons-use-in-ukraine-deeply-concerning-pentagon-says</a>
GIST	<p>The Pentagon on Monday expressed alarm about reports as yet unconfirmed that Russian forces loyal to President Vladimir Putin employed chemical weapons against Ukrainian troops in the besieged city of Mariupol – a move that, if true, would represent a major shift to the conflict there and Western involvement in it.</p>

The supposed use of some sort of toxic aerosol dropped from a drone apparently operated by Russian forces was first reported by the far-right Azov Regiment, one of the elements of Ukraine's armed forces operating in the key port city that has come under devastating and indiscriminate Russian shelling in recent weeks. The regiment reported late Monday that nearby troops subsequently had trouble breathing.

"We are aware of social media reports which claim Russian forces deployed a potential chemical munition in Mariupol, Ukraine. We cannot confirm at this time and will continue to monitor the situation closely," Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said in an emailed statement to U.S. News. "These reports, if true, are deeply concerning and reflective of concerns that we have had about Russia's potential to use a variety of riot control agents, including tear gas mixed with chemical agents, in Ukraine."

Other elements of the governments of the U.S. and Ukraine did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Several Ukrainian military sources operating in the conflict zone could not independently verify to U.S. News the substance of the reports.

However, those sources observe that the news comes a day after Putin appointed to take over command of Russian operations Gen. Alexander Dvornikov, who oversaw the [brutal and cruel Russian-backed campaign in Syria](#) of employing [toxic nerve agents indiscriminately](#) in densely populated civilian centers in gross violation of international law.

Western intelligence officials have warned that the Kremlin's [debunked propaganda](#) about U.S.-funded bioweapons labs in Ukraine served as a pretext for its own potential use of chemical weapons there.

The latest news, if confirmed, would be hugely consequential. Many Western leaders have previously warned that Russia's use of chemical weapons in Ukraine would, as NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said before a head-of-state summit last month, "be a blatant violation of international law and will have far-reaching consequences" and "totally change the nature of the conflict."

President Joe Biden said last month that any Russian chemical weapons use in Ukraine would force [a response "in kind"](#) from the U.S. The White House later clarified the president did not mean that American forces would employ chemical weapons but that it would escalate a conflict that, for the administration, has centered as much on supporting the Ukrainians as it has preventing the war from expanding elsewhere into Europe or dragging in NATO.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Russia unleashes attacks eastern Ukraine</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-unleashes-new-attacks-overnight-on-ukraines-eastern-region-11649754356?mod=hp_lead_pos7">https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-unleashes-new-attacks-overnight-on-ukraines-eastern-region-11649754356?mod=hp_lead_pos7</a>
GIST	<p>Russian forces fired on Ukrainian positions and residential areas in the country's east overnight and unleashed new rocket attacks, while fortifying positions there with new deployments of air-defense systems, Ukrainian officials said Tuesday.</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities are still investigating allegations by Ukrainian forces that they came under a Russian chemical attack in Mariupol, where Russia is still fighting to consolidate gains in the city, which Moscow sees as crucial to its efforts in <a href="#">taking over eastern Ukraine</a> and pushing westward.</p> <p>Russia's Defense Ministry said it was launching air and artillery strikes on Ukrainian positions in Mariupol.</p> <p>The U.K. Defense Ministry said fighting was continuing in Ukraine's south near the cities of Kherson and Mykolayiv and that Russia is continuing to emphasize the eastern Donbas region in <a href="#">a shifting war effort</a>. British intelligence said Russia would continue to redeploy its troops from Belarus to the Ukrainian east and likely try to take the eastern city of Kramatorsk, the site of <a href="#">a deadly missile attack</a> last week.</p>

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Tuesday that high-precision air- and sea-based missiles overnight destroyed an ammunition depot and a hangar with Ukrainian aircraft at the Starokostiantyniv military airfield in the western Khmelnytskyi region, as well as an ammunition depot near Havrylivka in the Kyiv region.

Ukraine's General Staff said Russians were boosting air-defense capabilities near Melitopol and Ilovaisk and added that it had repulsed six enemy attacks in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, destroying four Russian tanks and eight artillery systems. The Ukrainian Air Force said it had downed a Russian plane, two helicopters and four drones.

Ukrainian authorities said they are investigating a claim by their troops in the port city of Mariupol that they came under a Russian chemical weapons attack Monday.

The Ukrainian unit deployed in Mariupol, the Azov regiment, said Russian forces dropped an unknown chemical substance from a drone, causing respiratory and nervous-system symptoms among its troops and civilians. No independent evidence of the attack has emerged from Mariupol.

Railway connections were disrupted overnight in the Russian town of Shebekino, near the Ukrainian border northeast of Kharkiv, the regional governor told Russia's RIA news agency. There were no casualties, he said, and the cause of the disruption was being investigated.

Russia heavily uses the railways to reinforce and resupply its troops preparing the Donbas offensive, and Shebekino, in Russia's Belgorod region, sits on one of its main rail connections to the area. Russia last month said two Ukrainian helicopters launched an airstrike on a fuel depot in Belgorod, a claim Kyiv didn't confirm or deny.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 More ethanol in gasoline to tame prices</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/epa-will-allow-more-ethanol-in-gas-this-summer-in-bid-to-tame-prices-11649754000?mod=hp_lead_pos1">https://www.wsj.com/articles/epa-will-allow-more-ethanol-in-gas-this-summer-in-bid-to-tame-prices-11649754000?mod=hp_lead_pos1</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Biden administration plans to temporarily allow high-ethanol content gasoline to be sold in the hot summer months in a bid to tame high fuel prices at the pump, according to senior administration officials.</p> <p>The decision will allow gasoline with 15% ethanol to be sold between June 1 and Sept. 15. Normally only a 10% ethanol blend can be sold during that time period to reduce smog caused by the 15% blend's higher volatility.</p> <p>Allowing fuels with a higher ethanol content will lessen reliance on oil and give drivers more options, senior administration officials said, adding that it could save drivers 10 cents a gallon off current prices.</p> <p>Oil-industry officials have questioned whether such moves would lower prices. Higher ethanol blending can sometimes raise prices on refiners. Corn prices, like oil, have also seen <a href="#">sharp increases this year</a> because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Oil-industry leaders want Mr. Biden instead to find ways to encourage investment in more U.S. oil and gas production.</p> <p>"We're concerned that the administration is not focused on the real structural problems here and is attempting to find short-term fixes that don't get at the heart of the issue," Frank Macchiarola, the American Petroleum Institute's senior vice president of policy, economics and regulatory affairs, said.</p>

Environmentalists have also opposed past attempts to raise the summertime cap because of the additional smog created by the higher blend. But the higher content has long been supported by farmers who grow corn used to make ethanol.

The Environmental Protection Agency will cite [Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#) in issuing an emergency exemption to allow fuel with 15% ethanol to be sold over the summer, the officials said. They announced the action ahead of Mr. Biden's visit to an ethanol plant in Iowa on Tuesday.

"The focus here is also on making sure we are meeting the near-term supply emergency and doing so by leveraging homegrown fuels," one of the senior officials said.

The agency will review every 20 days whether to keep the emergency measure in place, officials said. E15, the term for gasoline with 15% ethanol, is currently sold at about 2,300 gas stations, according to the Biden administration. There are more than 150,000 fueling stations nationally, according to API.

Mr. Biden campaigned promising tougher environmental rules but has been under pressure for months to address historically [high gasoline prices](#).

Polls show voters are frustrated by inflation fed by those prices, and some congressional Democrats are anticipating tough midterm elections that could cost them control of the House and Senate.

Under former President [Donald Trump](#), the EPA moved to permanently allow summertime sales of gasoline with a 15% mix of ethanol, in what his administration described as a compromise between agriculture and energy interests.

U.S. refiners sued and a federal appeals court struck it down last summer, saying the Trump administration overreached its authority.

A three-judge panel on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit said the EPA had improperly reinterpreted legal language in the Clean Air Act long understood as limiting ethanol to 10% of the content of gasoline during summer months.

Senior Biden administration officials say their decision is based on different authority. They also said the EPA has determined there won't be environmental harm from the change.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Inflation reached four-decade high in March</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-inflation-consumer-price-index-march-2022-11649725215?mod=hp_lead_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/us-inflation-consumer-price-index-march-2022-11649725215?mod=hp_lead_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. inflation is estimated to have surpassed an 8% annual rate last month, driven by strong consumer demand, supply-chain disruptions and <a href="#">skyrocketing energy costs</a> related to <a href="#">Russia's invasion of Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>The Labor Department on Tuesday is expected to report that the consumer-price index rose 8.4% in March from the same month a year ago, <a href="#">accelerating from a 7.9% annual rate</a> in February, according to economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal. The CPI measures <a href="#">what consumers pay for goods and services</a>. The figures are set to be released at 8:30 a.m. ET.</p> <p>That would mark the sixth straight month for inflation above 6% and the fastest pace for inflation since January 1982, when it was on a <a href="#">recession-induced downswing</a> after the Federal Reserve aggressively tightened monetary policy.</p> <p>The so-called core price index, which excludes the often-volatile categories of food and energy, is estimated to have risen 6.6% in March from a year earlier—up from February's 6.4% rise, and the highest rate since August 1982.</p>

On a monthly basis, the CPI is expected to have climbed a seasonally adjusted 1.1% last month, from 0.8% in February.

High inflation is the downside of booming growth as the economy bounces back from [the Covid-19 pandemic](#), creating a tough balancing act for [the Fed as it tightens monetary policy](#) to douse price gains without damping growth.

“We’re seeing strong inflation momentum across the board, both for goods and services,” said Blerina Uruci, U.S. economist at [T. Rowe Price Group](#) Inc. Ms. Uruci said supply-chain constraints continue to push prices up, except for an easing of the costs for used cars.

“To me, this is a red flag,” said Ms. Uruci. “The other red flag is Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the rise of Covid in China. Those pose risks that the so-called normalization of supply chains takes longer to materialize.”

Persistently higher prices come as the overall economy is strong and the labor market is tight. Employers [added 431,000 jobs in March](#), the 11th consecutive month with gains above 400,000—the longest such stretch since records began in 1939.

High and rising inflation readings have cranked up pressure on the Fed to keep lifting interest rates this year to lower price pressures. The central bank [raised its benchmark rate](#) in March for the first time since 2018.

With job growth strong and inflation well above the Fed’s target, many Fed officials have indicated they could [support raising rates](#) by a half percentage point—instead of the traditional quarter point—at their next meeting in early May.

Energy prices soared in early March as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine [pushed up crude-oil prices](#). Though gasoline prices have come down slightly in recent weeks, they [remain near record highs](#).

Food inflation is also raising consumers’ grocery bills, pushed up by steady price increases for meat, eggs and citrus fruits. The Ukraine crisis is likely to add more pressure in coming months because of [disruptions to global wheat and fertilizer production](#).

The burden of price rises could be triggering a consumer pullback, said Richard F. Moody, chief economist at Regions Financial Corp. Consumer spending decelerated in February, [rising 0.2% from January](#), though it remains strong—up 13.7% from the same month in 2021.

“There’s an element of sticker shock when people go to fill up their tank or go to the grocery store. Lower- and middle-income households are already having [to make choices about what to buy](#) because they’re having to pay so much more for food and energy,” Mr. Moody said.

Alex Salwicz, 40 years old, is facing the rising costs of raising his five children. “The thing about having a big family is that each incremental increase is multiplied,” he said.

He said he has tried to substitute generic food products for name-brand foods as prices shot up—not always successfully. His children—ages 3 to 12—pushed back recently when he sneaked a bag of off-brand marshmallow cereal into a Lucky Charms box. “It didn’t pass,” said Mr. Salwicz, a program manager in information technology who lives in the Denver suburbs. “They had a little revolt, and more than one of them told me I shouldn’t do that again.”

Inflation has eroded their living standard in other ways, Mr. Salwicz said. The children have grumbled when the family crams uncomfortably into the smaller of two vans to save on gas. They have substituted a fast-food meal for the once-a-month sit-down dining experience. He and his wife, Amber Salwicz, are considering scrapping plans for summer camp because of a sharp increase in prices. One partial-day camp increased its price to \$800 a week this summer from \$500 the prior.

[The bounceback in demand for travel](#), dining and other services as Covid-19 cases decreased is also driving price gains, and could gain momentum as summer holidays spur more recreational spending. A steady upswing in housing costs, which account for nearly one-third of the CPI, is also adding to inflationary pressure.

Solid demand for labor has [shifted bargaining power toward workers](#), putting upward pressure on wages, which could feed into broader price gains. Annual wage growth was 6% in March, the fastest pace since records began in 1997, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's wage tracker.

Still, wages for most [are growing too slowly](#) to offset inflation. This could push workers to demand higher wages, creating a feedback loop that puts upward pressure on inflation.

One indicator of building inflationary pressure moderated in March. Consumers' median inflation expectation for three years from now fell to 3.7% last month, down from 3.8% February, according to a survey by the New York Fed released on Monday. However, the median expectation for inflation a year from now shot up to 6.6% from 6% in February.

Ron Mayland, an aerial photographer in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has experienced the triple-whammy of high costs from energy, supply-chain disruptions and labor.

"If you think filling up a car is expensive, try an airplane," he said, adding that he puts hundreds of dollars' worth of fuel in the tank every day. When he needed to buy small parts to repair one of his plane's oil-pressure systems, it took him two or three days to find the materials and they cost twice as much as he expected.

"I'm still getting sticker shock when pulling up to the pump, and then for the parts and the repairs—that's where it's really hitting me," he said. "It seems like the numbers are just getting bigger."

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HEADLINE	04/11 US long-term policy toward Russia?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-is-the-u-s-s-long-term-policy-toward-russia-now-11649669581?mod=hp_lead_pos10">https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-is-the-u-s-s-long-term-policy-toward-russia-now-11649669581?mod=hp_lead_pos10</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—In the six weeks since <a href="#">Russia's invasion of Ukraine</a>, the Biden administration has imposed a series of sanctions on Moscow, armed the Ukrainians, <a href="#">mobilized Western allies</a> in opposition to Russian President <a href="#">Vladimir Putin</a> and <a href="#">sought to make him an international pariah</a>.</p> <p>The response has brought U.S.-Russia relations to their lowest point since the Cold War. Left unclear is the impact on Washington's posture toward Russia in the long term and how permanent the U.S. government's actions would be, should Moscow <a href="#">change its trajectory in Ukraine</a>.</p> <p>So far, the Biden administration has <a href="#">focused on using sanctions</a> to inflict <a href="#">pain on Russia's energy and financial sectors</a>, its <a href="#">wealthy oligarchs</a> and military complex, in a bid to force Russia to withdraw from Ukraine and end hostilities.</p> <p>Yet President Biden has also <a href="#">labeled Mr. Putin a war criminal</a> whose <a href="#">actions merit a trial</a> and suggested the <a href="#">Russian president cannot remain in power</a>, a remark that prompted a swift White House follow-up that regime change wasn't U.S. policy.</p> <p>That rhetoric has raised questions about whether the U.S. hopes to see Mr. Putin ousted and put on trial, or would look for a way to resume diplomatic and commercial relations should a cease-fire be achieved between Russia and Ukraine—or would chart a path somewhere in between.</p>



A return to anything approaching normal while Mr. Putin remains in charge appears unlikely, some former officials and Russia experts say, and Mr. Biden himself has reaffirmed his view that the world would be better off without the current Russian president.

“Once this war is over—and of course, it may not be over for some time—it’s very hard to see U.S.-Russia relations recovering as long as Vladimir Putin is in power,” said Angela Stent, a professor at Georgetown University and a Russia specialist.

National security officials acknowledge that the Biden administration [failed in its goal to have a “stable and predictable” relationship](#) with Russia due to Mr. Putin’s invasion, and that ties are unlikely to return to where they stood before the war. But it is too soon to draw up a new overarching approach toward Moscow, they say.

“There will be no relief from sanctions or other costs we have and will continue to impose on Russia until President Putin reverses course and relents in his brutal aggression,” State Department spokesman Ned Price said last month, a refrain repeated by top White House officials in recent days.

Maintaining flexibility over the longer term to allow Mr. Putin to seek a diplomatic exit or to respond to changes on the battlefield could have its advantages.

So far, Ukraine and Russia have engaged in several rounds of [cease-fire talks to no avail](#). Should Moscow and Kyiv reach a peace deal, the U.S. and European countries would likely be willing to lift some but not all sanctions on Moscow as part of the arrangement, assuming Ukraine supported the move, former administration officials said. The U.S. and its allies have avoided telegraphing what it would take to lift sanctions.

John Herbst, U.S. ambassador to Ukraine during the George W. Bush administration, said some kind of thaw could be possible with the Russian leader retaining power.

“I despise Putin, but if he tomorrow were to recognize that he can’t win in Ukraine, he’s stopping the war...then our relationship will get better,” said Mr. Herbst, who is now at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington. He said one way for Mr. Putin to achieve sanctions relief would be to return to the status quo before the invasion, which the Russian leader has shown no interest in doing.

After [failing to seize Kyiv quickly](#) and oust the government, Russian forces are now regrouping and are [expected to launch a new offensive](#) in the Donbas region of Ukraine in coming weeks.

Elsewhere, Russia and the U.S. are expected to continue cooperating on some strategic and security objectives. Biden administration officials point to negotiations with Iran over reviving the Obama-era nuclear accord, in which Russia is a key participant; talks about the reconstruction of Afghanistan following the U.S. withdrawal last summer; and arms control and involvement in the International Space Station.

A State Department spokeswoman said the U.S. government has no intention of suspending diplomatic relations with the Kremlin, despite Moscow’s threats to sever such ties. Diplomats with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, whose numbers have been reduced dramatically, continue to engage with Russian officials.

Still, [alleged Russian war crimes](#) are an issue that could complicate relations between the U.S. and Russia in the future.

Officials in the Biden administration and other allied countries have pointed to killings of civilians blamed on Russian forces in the [town of Bucha](#) and the [city of Mariupol](#) as potential evidence of wartime atrocities for which Russia should be held accountable. The U.S. Justice Department on Wednesday said it was helping foreign prosecutors gather [evidence of possible war crimes](#) in Ukraine.

“With the pounding of Mariupol that is happening in front of our eyes and the latest events in Bucha—that really puts Putin beyond the pale,” said Eugene Rumer, a former intelligence officer who leads the Russia program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. “I don’t know what leader can sit down with Putin—even at that long table where world leaders meet with him—and negotiate something and shake hands on it.”

The Biden administration has also been [bracing for potential escalation on Russia’s part](#) and recently said the U.S. has been supplying Ukraine with protective equipment and supplies in case the Russians used chemical or biological weapons.

The White House has repeatedly ruled out sending U.S. troops to Ukraine or instituting a no-fly zone, but it has signaled that a chemical-weapons attack by Russia would trigger a response from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Negotiations to end the war are likely to become more difficult as more allegations of civilian killings emerge, said Michael McFaul, U.S. ambassador to Russia in the Obama administration.

“There can be no return to business as usual with Putin as a leader,” said Mr. McFaul, now a professor at Stanford University.

For now, the U.S. and its allies are left with the hope that sanctions and Ukrainian resistance will force Mr. Putin to back down. They have failed so far to stop Moscow’s offensive, even though the Russian economy is headed into what the International Monetary Fund and other global financial institutions say [will likely be a deep recession](#).

Officials note that punitive economic measures take time to bite. But sanctions programs against authoritarian regimes in North Korea, Iran, Venezuela and Cuba have failed to achieve major shifts in those governments.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D., Md.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said broad economic sanctions on Russia could be lowered as a part of a peace deal, should Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky agree. But he said he didn’t want Mr. Zelensky to be pressured to accept a deal.

He also said sanctions aimed at Mr. Putin and efforts to hold Russians to account over human rights should remain in place.

“Putin has to be held accountable—that means war-crimes accountability,” he said.

Said Sen. Thom Tillis (R., N.C.), a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee: “I hope at some point we’ll be able to normalize relations with a leader of Russia. I just don’t know if that could ever be with Vladimir Putin.”

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 US: Russia brutal tactics to continue</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/12/russia-ukraine-war-news-live-updates/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/12/russia-ukraine-war-news-live-updates/</a>
GIST	<p>Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet his ally, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, for talks Tuesday about Ukraine and ways to “counter” pressure from sanctions by the West, Russian news agencies reported. Putin flew to Russia’s far-east Amur region for the talks — as his military sends reinforcements and supplies to troops positioned in Ukraine’s east.</p> <p>The Pentagon press secretary warned that the “same brutal tactics, that same disregard for civilian life and civilian infrastructure, will probably continue” as Russia pivots east and <a href="#">appoints a new commander for its war</a>. A sprawling, eight-mile-long Russian military convoy — believed to include a command element, a support battalion, helicopter support and other forces — has maneuvered north of Izyum, which is likely to become a staging point for further attacks on southern cities, <a href="#">the Pentagon said</a>.</p>

	The Defense Department is monitoring unconfirmed reports that Russia has used chemical weapons during its siege of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol. Britain's armed forces minister said that "all options" would be on the table for the international community to respond if such reports were confirmed. <a href="#">Britain</a> and <a href="#">Australia</a> — which called the allegation "deeply concerning" — said they were working with partners to verify the details.
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Putin feels sting of failure; regrouping</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/11/putin-misjudged-ukraine-hubris-isolation/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/04/11/putin-misjudged-ukraine-hubris-isolation/</a>
GIST	<p>More than six weeks into his war against Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin is feeling the sting of failure.</p> <p>Thousands of <a href="#">Russian battlefield deaths</a>. Three front-line retreats by the Russian military. Millions of Ukrainians who will never forgive Moscow. More isolation than ever — and perilously few goals achieved.</p> <p>Putin is now <a href="#">regrouping</a> to focus his military campaign on Ukraine's east in what is widely seen as "Plan B," after his forces failed to topple Ukraine's government or wrest control of its biggest cities. All the while, questions are mounting about how a Russian leader steeped in security policy and known for railing against the folly of regime-change wars could have sleepwalked into a such a strategic morass.</p> <p>At issue is a broader quandary that will occupy historians for years: How could Russia — a country with such deep familial, cultural and historic ties to its western neighbor — get Ukraine so wrong?</p> <p>Officials in the United States and Europe are piecing together the answer to that question. What emerges, those officials say, is a picture of a hubristic and isolated leader, beset by biases and skewed information, pressing forward with a calamitous decision without consulting his full cohort of advisers. Putin rushed headlong into Ukraine, confident in his ability to secure a quick victory and weather any blowback within the authoritarian system he erected at home, they said. Underpinning his assumptions: misconceptions about Ukraine fundamentally rooted in Moscow's colonial past.</p> <p>"Historically, there just hasn't been expertise on Ukraine in Russia at all," said Alina Polyakova, president and CEO of the Washington-based Center for European Policy Analysis. "When you don't believe a country's a real country and a people's a real people, why would you invest any expertise in a thing you don't think exists?"</p> <p><b>A former spy's personal fingerprints</b></p> <p>In the run-up to the war, some leaders in Europe and Ukraine discounted the possibility that Putin would invade, because they didn't see sufficient Russian forces amassed along the border for Moscow to succeed with a multi-front offensive and subsequent occupation.</p> <p>What they didn't realize was that Moscow was nurturing deeply flawed assumptions, particularly about the fortitude of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and the willingness of Ukrainians to resist, and was indeed planning a large-scale invasion — just an ill-conceived one. The operation, analysts said, bore the personal fingerprints of Putin.</p> <p>"It's clear this was a military operation designed by spooks, not generals," said Mark Galeotti, a Russia analyst at Mayak Intelligence. "It makes no sense in purely military terms."</p> <p>According to U.S. and European officials, Putin had been keeping the plans very close-hold, with top military commanders and trusted advisers unaware that Russia was going to mount an offensive.</p> <p>The Russian leader notoriously doesn't use a smartphone and rarely accesses the Internet. He spent years snuffing out Russian independent news and erecting an authoritarian system of government devoid of constructive feedback or dissent. By early this year, according to U.S. and European officials, he was</p>

operating in an echo chamber, surrounded by advisers who, according to Galeotti, “had learned you do not bring bad news to the czar’s table.” Putin’s isolation, the officials said, had been compounded by the [coronavirus](#) and his limited contact with others.

“It’s demonstrably obvious now that there was a combination of people not telling him what he needed to hear and him not listening when they did tell him stuff that he didn’t want to hear,” said James Cleverly, Britain’s minister of state for Europe and North America.

Putin has long viewed independent Ukraine as a quirk of the Soviet empire’s collapse that needed to be handled personally. According to Russian journalist Mikhail Zygar’s book “All the Kremlin’s Men,” Putin for years controlled policy toward Ukraine himself because he didn’t trust anyone else.

“We need to deal with Ukraine or we’ll lose it,” Putin would say at meetings dating back to the early 2000s, according to Zygar, who labeled Putin’s coterie of close advisers the “Collective Putin,” because they tend to tailor their activities to anticipate his desires.

Putin’s confidence in his personal expertise on Ukraine came through in a lengthy [treatise](#) he published last summer. The article portrayed Ukrainians as a people who are naturally the same as Russians but have been taken hostage by Western governments bent on radicalizing them against Moscow.

“That leads to this belief by Putin and others that if you can just decapitate the Zelensky government, knock out the political leadership, then there will be an outpouring of pro-Russian sentiment by the rest of Ukrainian society,” said Andrea Kendall-Taylor, a senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security.

Russia got Ukraine wrong “because this was totally a Putin-directed operation,” said a U.S. official who specializes in Russia and like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information. Putin, the official said, “is as convinced as anyone can be of his truths.”

#### **‘An enormous amount of arrogance’**

The assumption of a quick Ukrainian government collapse undergirded the invasion, according to Ukrainian, U.S. and European officials. In the early days of the war, Russian state news already began promoting the notion that Zelensky had fled, even as [he posted videos from Kyiv](#).

Putin had witnessed a rapid collapse of the Ukrainian government when former president Viktor Yanukovich decamped to Russia in 2014. According to Zygar, Putin shouted at Yanukovich not to leave Kyiv and described him as a “cowardly piece of s---” when he fled the capital in response to a pro-Western uprising. Those events may have led Putin to imagine a similar scenario with Zelensky.

Putin’s misconception about Ukrainian weakness was paired with a swaggering view of Russian power. He famously [boasted](#) to a top European official in late 2014 that he could easily seize Kyiv “in two weeks” if he desired — a misconception he appeared to continue believing until he attempted to do so.

“He has an unwavering belief in his ability to control events,” a senior NATO intelligence official said.

Perhaps no moment underscored the level of misconception more than the attempt by elite Russian paratroopers at the outset of the invasion to land at the Hostomel cargo airport northwest of Kyiv — apparently with the intention of sweeping breezily into the Ukrainian capital.

“Just looking at how this played out, it feels there was an enormous amount of arrogance,” a European official said. “You look at the insertion of the airborne forces at Hostomel airport, which was clearly designed to do a decapitation [mission] in Kyiv — and they got smashed.”

Alexander Gabuev, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Moscow Center, said the Russian leadership doesn’t see Ukraine, a place once controlled by Moscow, as deserving of rigorous study.

“There was this false sense of familiarity,” Gabuev said. “That’s what Russia completely misunderstood.” Once the assumptions proved false, [Russia’s military proved unable to regroup](#), saddled by fuel, ammunition, transport, food and other logistics problems, as well as demoralized soldiers who hadn’t been told they were about to fight a war.

“If the initial plan is bad and none of the other preparation is there, there’s no durability,” Rand Corp. senior defense analyst Scott Boston said.

Where Russia relies primarily on its foreign intelligence service, the SVR, to collect information about countries such as the United States and China, when it comes to countries in the “near abroad” including Ukraine, Moscow enlists the FSB, primarily a domestic intelligence service.

Andrei Soldatov, a Russian journalist who specializes in Russian intelligence, said the FSB regularly failed to understand the popular and grass-roots movements fundamental to Ukraine’s political culture.

U.S. and European officials said Russia’s poor performance in the initial stages of the war has led to a bad blood between the Russian military and intelligence establishments and a serious search for scapegoats.

What exactly Russian intelligence was reporting to Putin regarding Ukraine before the war is unclear, but multiple U.S. and European officials said Putin’s immediate advisers had shown an unwillingness to give the Russian president information that challenged his assumptions. Individuals lower down in Russia’s security establishment thought the invasion was ill-conceived but their concerns didn’t reach the top, the officials said.

In U.S. and European intelligence circles, the FSB’s reputation stands in contrast to the ruthless, cunning reputation of its predecessor, the KGB. Several current and former officials described the Russian security service as rife with corruption, beset by bureaucratic bloat and ultimately out of touch.

A Ukrainian intelligence official said the FSB had spent millions recruiting a network of pro-Russian collaborators who ultimately told Putin and his top advisers, among them the current FSB director, what they wanted to hear: The central government in Kyiv wouldn’t hold and resistance would collapse.

The official singled out pro-Russian politician Viktor Medvedchuk, who made Putin the godfather of his daughter, as a significant source of misleading information. Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian politician who has long promoted Russian interests, was charged with treason last year but allegedly escaped house arrest in the days after the invasion.

European officials said the Kremlin was also getting information from out-of-touch former elites associated with Yanukovych, who, like Medvedchuk, stood to gain from a Russian power grab. In the weeks before the invasion, the British government [warned](#) that Russian intelligence was plotting with Yanukovych’s former prime minister, chief of staff and deputy prime minister.

Regardless of the information stream, Putin believes himself to be the biggest expert on Ukraine, Soldatov said, noting the tendency of Russian officials to assume they understand Ukraine.

“This level of chauvinism — you can see it everywhere,” Soldatov said. “It’s a direct legacy of this unfortunate imperial past.”

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 America’s nuclear waste problem</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2022/04/11/america-nuclear-waste-san-onofre/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2022/04/11/america-nuclear-waste-san-onofre/</a>
GIST	A little more than a decade ago, Marni Magda was reading Scientific American magazine in her living room when she came across an infographic titled “Aging Fleet under Review.” Published shortly after an earthquake and tsunami caused meltdowns at Japan’s Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, the two-page spread showed a map of nuclear facilities across the United States, with color coding to indicate seismic risk. Looking to her own region, coastal Southern California, Magda spotted a nuclear plant icon



superimposed over an alarming shade of red. It represented the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, about 20 miles south of her city, Laguna Beach, and near multiple geological faults. “I realized as a California resident, we were in a great deal of trouble,” she recalled recently.

For Magda, a retired elementary school teacher, the interpretive map has acquired a status akin to a sacred text; she kept it and had it laminated. She handed it to me as we sat at a table in her backyard, birds chirping riotously in a large orange tree heavy with fruit. She explained that soon after her wake-up call in 2011, she found other area residents who also feared that an earthquake or tsunami could lead to a nuclear disaster in Southern California. She began attending marches in the state park adjacent to the plant, holding banners aloft and chanting, “Shut it down!”

The plant, which had about 2,000 employees and produced enough electricity to power 1.4 million homes, had operated since 1968. The looming domes of its two reactors were visible to drivers on Interstate 5, a heavily trafficked freeway, and to surfers who trekked from all over the world to catch waves at famed beaches nearby. The utility company that ran the plant, Southern California Edison (SCE), assured the public that the facility could withstand any plausible seismic or weather event. But in 2013, SCE announced that San Onofre would be decommissioned for a different reason: Flaws had been discovered in the steam generators. Many community members hailed the decision as a victory. “Oh, I was thrilled,” Magda, now 75, told me. “I was absolutely thrilled.”

The celebration, however, was short-lived. Magda and other activists realized that all of the high-level radioactive waste that had accumulated at the plant over the course of its lifetime — 1,600 tons of spent fuel rods — would remain at the site for the foreseeable future. Although the federal government is legally responsible for disposing of commercial spent nuclear fuel in a permanent underground repository, there has been no plan for fulfilling that obligation since the Obama administration halted the project at Nevada’s [Yucca Mountain](#) in 2010. There are currently [about 80 locations in 35 states](#) — mostly at operational and decommissioned nuclear plants — where spent fuel is being stored indefinitely.

Since the San Onofre plant shut down, Magda has been trying to get the spent fuel moved to a more suitable site and to ensure that, until then, it is stored as safely as possible. As of 2017, she has represented her local chapter of the Sierra Club on the Community Engagement Panel, an entity established by SCE that holds quarterly meetings with the public. In her garage, she showed me a gray filing cabinet with four vertically stacked drawers, her granddaughter’s teal bike propped up against the side. The drawers contain hundreds of manila files with hand-scrawled labels: “Western Interstate Energy Board,” “Sierra Club — Comments on Scoping Process,” “Thick vs. Thin Canisters & Corrosion Cracking.” Inside the folders are notes from meetings, business cards of public officials, news clippings, academic papers and government reports. In addition to earthquakes and tsunamis, Magda and other activists are worried about coastal erosion and [sea level rise](#) caused by climate change. “We can’t leave it here,” Magda says.

The question of what to do with the nation’s spent nuclear fuel has recently garnered renewed attention. This is thanks in part to U.S. Rep. Mike Levin (D-Calif.), who represents the district encompassing San Onofre and has taken up the cause as one of his signature issues. An environmental lawyer by training, he told me he ran for Congress partially to make progress on reviving the nation’s stalled efforts. In January 2019, he established a [task force](#) of local stakeholders to study the situation at San Onofre. He has also co-founded the bipartisan [Spent Nuclear Fuel Solutions Caucus](#), with Rep. Rodney Davis (R-Ill.), and introduced the [Spent Fuel Prioritization Act](#), which would ensure that the material is moved first from the most sensitive locations, including San Onofre.

Among scientific experts and government officials, there is broad consensus that the optimal solution is to eventually bury nuclear waste in a deep geological repository. But that is a long-term goal, and in the near future, Levin and many others are pushing for “consolidated interim storage.” This would mean that the spent fuel scattered at sites across the country would be moved to one or more facilities, in appropriate settings, that would be devoted entirely to safely storing the fuel until a geological disposal facility is ready.



There is also agreement, of a limited sort, between many nuclear opponents and supporters on the importance of addressing the waste issue. But for many opponents, such as Magda, the waste is a reason to abandon this form of energy altogether. By contrast, supporters of nuclear power — the generation of which does not emit greenhouse gases — seek to resolve the spent fuel issue to clear hurdles to its expansion. A better waste management strategy is essential if nuclear power, which provides almost half of the country's low-carbon electricity, is to play a meaningful role in a future energy system that does not rely on fossil fuels. To reach its goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, the Biden administration has called for substantial investments in nuclear reactors. "The United States views nuclear energy as a pivotal technology in the global effort to lower emissions, expand economic opportunity, and ultimately combat climate change," Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm has said in a statement.

Despite recent momentum to break the spent fuel impasse, the obstacles are considerable. "Frankly we have a real problem in the U.S., not just at San Onofre," Levin told me. "San Onofre is just the symptom, with 9 million people within 50 miles and two earthquake faults and rising sea level. The actual problem is that we've got nowhere to move it to."

In a landmark 1957 report by the National Academy of Sciences, "The Disposal of Radioactive Waste on Land," the authors proposed that the most viable method would be to inter it deep underground, preferably in salt mines. In the ensuing years, different ideas — including burying the waste in ice sheets and shooting it out into space — were thrown around. But the enduring conventional wisdom favors the original idea of deep geological repositories.

The 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act was the first major law to address spent nuclear fuel, and assigned the federal government the task of constructing and operating such facilities. By that time, there were dozens of commercial nuclear plants that had been accumulating spent fuel and storing it on-site with no plans for disposal. According to the law, the Department of Energy was required to move promptly to site two geological repositories for permanent disposal.

In 1987, however, amendments to this law identified only a single location: Yucca Mountain, about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The selection was based on the Energy Department's assessment of the site's geological features and was also thought to reflect political dynamics at the time. In the state, the legislation became known as the "[Screw Nevada Bill](#)." Nevada's powerful long-serving senator, Harry M. Reid, made it his mission to see that this repository would never come to pass. In 2010, the Obama administration announced that it would withdraw the license application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for the project. "We're done with Yucca," Carol Browner, President Barack Obama's energy adviser, said. (The United States does have a deep geological repository for defense waste, in New Mexico, but not for commercial spent fuel.)

Meanwhile, Obama's secretary of energy convened the bipartisan Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future to devise a new strategy. The commission issued a report in January 2012. "The overall record of the U.S. nuclear waste program has been one of broken promises and unmet commitments," the [report](#) stated.

The report's first recommendation, highlighting its importance, was a "consent-based approach to siting future nuclear waste management facilities" for both permanent underground disposal and temporary aboveground storage. That is, instead of selecting sites based strictly on physical characteristics, the new approach would solicit volunteers, and engage communities, states, tribes and other stakeholders to obtain their approval before proceeding with plans. This idea was built around observations of more successful programs in other countries, including Finland and Sweden. The goal is "to work with the community to find out what they need, what they want, from their point of view, not from our point of view," Tom Isaacs, a veteran nuclear waste expert who served as lead adviser to the commission, told me. This could mean jobs, investment in parks and schools, or other forms of compensation.

The Blue Ribbon Commission report was widely regarded as a seminal document in nuclear policy circles. But until recently, virtually no progress had been made toward implementing its recommendations, which included developing one or more geological disposal facilities as well as one or more consolidated storage

facilities. (The Trump administration briefly tried to revive the Yucca Mountain plan, then [reversed course](#).) “I’m both happy and sad that 10 years later, they’re still looking at that report,” Isaacs told me — proud that it is still a go-to resource for those working on the issue but frustrated that so little has changed.

The spent fuel at San Onofre is stored in 123 canisters, in what’s called an independent spent fuel storage installation (ISFSI, pronounced “ISSfuhsee”). Contrary to the popular impression of nuclear waste as green goo, the fuel rods consist of solid pellets, each slightly larger than a pencil eraser. The fuel rods, bundled into fuel assemblies, were retrieved from the reactors over the course of decades. After cooling for at least five years in pools of water, they were transferred into stainless-steel canisters, with walls five-eighths of an inch thick. Workers then transferred the loaded canisters, each of which weighs 50 tons, to a concrete pad overlooking the ocean and lowered them into stainless-steel cavities beneath the pad’s surface.

When I visited the site recently, on a bright, gusty day, I was led by John Dobken, San Onofre’s public information officer, and Jerry Stephenson, the ISFSI engineering manager, through security and outside to the concrete pad. On our way, we passed workers in hard hats engaged in the ongoing demolition of the plant — major decommissioning work is expected to continue through 2028 — as well as the construction of a rail yard. It was a reminder that radioactive spent fuel is not the only kind of waste produced by nuclear plants: Millions of pounds of metal and steel, and tens of thousands of titanium tubes, will eventually be loaded onto rail cars and shipped away, some to be recycled, some to a landfill. One day, according to the plan, the spent fuel will be shipped away on this rail line as well, though no one knows to where.

Out on the concrete pad, in my immediate vicinity, I could see a partially demolished industrial site; farther out, it looked like a commercial for a seaside vacation. The pad is elevated above sea level, but the ocean is about 100 feet away, behind a sea wall. “Dry fuel storage is very self-sufficient,” Stephenson said. “There’s no fans, there’s no cooling systems; it just sits there, fat, dumb and happy, as I like to say.”

We could not see the canisters, which were below our feet, inside the enclosures. Dobken told me that each canister was surrounded on the sides by 10 feet of concrete, as well as a three-foot reinforced concrete slab at both the top and the bottom, all of which blocks radiation that isn’t shielded by the stainless steel. According to SCE, the canisters were designed to handle any earthquake that could occur in the area and up to 125 feet of water. (There are two sections of the ISFSI with somewhat different designs; the older one is farther from the shore, above grade, and built for inundation by 50 feet of water.)

When I mentioned that I felt warm air emanating from the enclosures, Stephenson explained that vents allow air to continuously cool the spent fuel, and the air comes out heated. “I joke that we should put a little restaurant out here and serve drinks,” he said. He assured me that almost no radiation was escaping. A radiation monitor installed on the pad showed a reading of 13 microrem per hour, just slightly higher than the area’s natural background radiation. (For context, over the course of a cross-country flight passengers — because they are closer to the sun — are exposed to about 3,500 microrem, or 3.5 millirem.)

How dangerous is this material? As with everything related to nuclear power, answers to that question are highly polarized. As is so often the case, you can tell where someone stands by the language they use: Opponents call the substance “waste” and the sites where it’s stored “waste dumps.” Proponents tend to call it “used fuel,” as opposed to “spent,” to indicate that it has the potential to be recycled; they see it less as a threat than as a resource. These differences in perspective have been underscored by recent events. The attack on Ukraine’s [Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant](#) proved to anti-nuclear advocates that the energy source is unacceptably risky; pro-nuclear people see the geopolitical situation as a sign that Europe needs more nuclear power to pry itself from dependence on Russian oil and gas.

The fear of this substance, whatever we might call it, is hardly without basis. The 1957 National Academy of Sciences report stated, “Unlike the disposal of any other type of waste, the hazard related to radioactive waste is so great that no element of doubt should be allowed to exist regarding safety.” Being in the same room with unshielded nuclear waste, fresh out of the reactor, could very quickly give you a fatal dose of radiation.

Proponents argue that these hazards are real but entirely manageable. As Maria G. Korsnick, president and CEO of the Nuclear Energy Institute, put it in a recent New America [webinar](#), “We know exactly where it is, we know exactly what it is, and it’s being very safely stored. ... There’s other forms of generation that create waste, many of which you’re breathing.” James Lovelock, the British scientist best known for originating the Gaia hypothesis, the idea that life on Earth interacts with the planet to form a self-regulating system, is a [champion of nuclear energy](#). “The nuclear waste is a minor burial problem, but the carbon dioxide waste will kill us all if we go on emitting it,” he wrote in a 2009 book.

Another point of contention involves the prospect of recycling. “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure,” said Korsnick in the webinar, noting that “the thing we call waste” has more than 90 percent of its potential energy still untapped. The United States has eschewed reprocessing because of concerns about proliferation — that is, the risk that the material could be diverted for weapons — but other countries, such as France, do reprocess used fuel in civilian nuclear reactors. Recently, fresh interest in this option has emerged in the States. In March, Oklo, an advanced nuclear start-up, along with Deep Isolation, a company focused on nuclear waste disposal, won a \$4 million grant from the Energy Department to develop the nation’s first nuclear fuel recycling and disposal facility.

Some of these divergent views, and gradations in between, are apparent in the community surrounding San Onofre. The community has been vigilantly monitoring the decommissioning process, with a contingent of activists who are critical of SCE. The Community Engagement Panel’s meetings have been well attended, and before they shifted online because of the pandemic, often raucous. David Victor, a professor of public policy at the University of California at San Diego, was tapped by the utility to lead the panel. “I’ve visited many plants in various state of closure,” he told me. “I’ve never seen this degree of public engagement.”

Rob Howard worked at the plant for 31 years. During that time, “I did pretty much everything,” he told me recently over a turkey sandwich, when we met at a cafe. In addition to working as a reactor operator and on the decommissioning, he was heavily involved in the union. Since being laid off in 2020, he started an energy consulting firm called Zodiac Solutions and has participated in both Levin’s task force and SCE’s Community Engagement Panel.

Howard grew up in Memphis, as the son of a Baptist preacher. After a stint in the Navy, he was hired at San Onofre in 1989. His experience as a Black man in the nuclear industry gave him a distinctive, nuanced perspective. It wasn’t always easy; the industry is overwhelmingly White. At work, as in the rest of his life, he explains, he was obliged to put himself “in a position where people aren’t afraid of me. I cross the street before you do because I don’t want you to accuse me of anything. I can’t get angry at work. The onus is on me to keep you from being fearful.”

Nonetheless, he appreciated the economic security his career gave him. He has lived a good life with his wife and two children in Oceanside, a beach community not far from San Onofre. In fact, he felt an unexpected affinity with his job. “Nuclear power, I kind of had a kinship with it,” he told me, “because I knew people were afraid of it, and I knew what that felt like.”

As for the spent fuel, he says he is not particularly concerned about the risks, at least in the near term. But he supports efforts to move it, and he believes hosting it could present significant opportunities for the right community. He’s skeptical, however, that the government will exhibit the “cultural competence” to engage these communities in a constructive way. “I’m not saying the people who are doing it are bad people. But I always tell people: It’s not your intent. What’s the impact of your work? Are you actually having real conversations, and the people who you’re talking to, do they trust you?”

Other area residents are focused less on moving the fuel and more on addressing what they see as deficiencies in the current storage system. They were alarmed by a “near miss” incident in August 2018 when a canister was improperly lowered into an enclosure and was briefly wedged there. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission later reported that “the canister could have dropped 18 feet into the storage vault if the canister had slipped off the metal flange,” and it identified “multiple performance deficiencies.” SCE also did not notify the NRC Operations Center in a timely manner. In the aftermath, the utility instituted

new training and procedures. But some community members have raised questions about the integrity of the canisters and the plans for addressing any problems that might arise.

Another reason some activists place less emphasis on moving the fuel is that they doubt it will happen in their lifetimes. “The idea of ‘just get it out of there’ is a convenient motto,” says Cathy Iwane, a yoga instructor and American activist who was living in Japan at the time of the Fukushima accident and now lives in Del Mar, another city in Southern California. (She serves as secretary of the Coalition for Nuclear Safety, an umbrella group of concerned organizations and individuals.) But Iwane and others are also wary of foisting their problem on a less affluent community. They believe that consolidated interim storage would inevitably drag on longer than promised. Iwane acknowledges that “some disenfranchised community will get infrastructure, equity and money,” but notes that “they will also be saddled with the nation’s radioactive waste.”

During the past decade, as the stalemate in the United States has continued, a handful of other countries have made progress in planning for the disposal of their nuclear waste. Finland is very close to opening the world’s first geological repository for spent fuel, and Sweden is not far behind, while Canada has narrowed its search to two possible host communities. They all followed the principles of consent-based siting: They invited communities that were potentially interested to engage in a dialogue, learn about the possibilities without making a commitment, and discuss their priorities and concerns.

According to Tom Isaacs, who is now an adviser to both SCE and Canada’s Nuclear Waste Management Organization, the Canadians pay candidate communities to do “visioning exercises.” “They give them money to do the work to say, ‘Where would we like our community to go? How could this help us? What would we need in order for this facility to make our community better?’”

I spoke with Penny Lucas, the mayor of Ignace, Ontario, one of the two final candidate communities in Canada. She told me that the economy in Ignace had been based on mining — for gold, palladium and other metals — and forestry. But in recent decades, the mines have become less active, and the population has shrunk to about 1,300 people, roughly a fifth of whom are Indigenous and the rest White. She sees a nuclear waste repository — which would be about 22 miles away, in an uninhabited area — as an economic development opportunity. “There’s the possibility of getting our students, the younger generation, educated and ready for when the project does come here, then they’ll be able to apply for the jobs that would come along,” she says. Other workers would also presumably move to town, bringing ancillary benefits like new shops and restaurants.

Is she worried about safety? “Everybody hears the word ‘nuclear’ and they panic,” she responds. “Everything in life is a risk. We understand that. The forestry, the mining, all the things our community has been involved with already.” The question, she says, is “how you’re going to manage those risks.”

In the United States, we are nowhere near siting a permanent repository, but the Energy Department has begun working toward a program for interim storage facilities, with a budget of \$20 million allocated for each of the past two fiscal years. In December, the department issued a [request for information](#) on consent-based siting for such facilities, inviting any member of the public to submit comments on what such a process should look like. The Energy Department’s developing approach “centers equity and environmental justice” and “makes the needs of people and communities central,” Kim Petry, the agency’s acting deputy assistant secretary for spent fuel and waste disposition, said in a virtual meeting with SCE’s Community Engagement Panel in February. In terms of how they will define consent, Petry told me: “It will be based on what the communities want. One community might want a referendum. One might want their state legislatures to vote on it.” She promised “close collaboration with these communities.”

Although the government is not yet at the stage of negotiating with towns or cities, two corporate ventures have engaged in talks with communities in New Mexico and Texas about potentially hosting interim storage sites through private initiatives. That is, the initiatives would be for-profit enterprises led by the companies — Holtec and Orano — that manufactured the spent fuel canisters, although they would still need approval from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Hobbs, N.M., is one of these communities; the proposed site is 35 miles from the closest population center. The four co-owners of the land — Hobbs, neighboring Carlsbad, and their respective counties — entered into an agreement with Holtec. In exchange for the land, Hobbs would get jobs associated with the storage and royalties from Holtec’s gross revenue. (The majority of the town’s population, according to 2020 Census data, identifies as both Hispanic/Latino and White.) In terms of community consent, Hobbs Mayor Sam Cobb told me there has been no formal mechanism to gauge it. According to Cobb, at public meetings, many more people have expressed support than opposition. In the state legislature, however, bills have been introduced to block the site from proceeding.

When I asked Cobb about the possibility of becoming a de facto permanent storage site, he replied with his own question: “If you had a situation where you felt something was inherently safe and you could get revenue for the next hundred years, would you take the deal?”

Marni Magda, the retired teacher, believes that the waste at San Onofre is stored as safely as possible. She even flew with other members of the Community Engagement Panel to a Holtec factory in Turtle Creek, Pa., in 2018 to learn about the canisters and considers them “top-of-the-line.” Still, her mind is not eased. “There are so many things we don’t have control of,” she told me.

Magda points out that for real progress to occur, the law needs to change so that Yucca Mountain is not the only permissible site for a permanent repository. Levin has not yet introduced legislation to change that, but he told me he plans to. One arguable reason for optimism is that an improved waste management strategy, unlike so many other causes, has bipartisan support. “Nuclear waste doesn’t care if you’re a Democrat or a Republican,” Levin says.

But the challenges are formidable. Isaacs, the veteran nuclear waste expert, told me that in other countries there are higher levels of trust in the government and in fellow citizens. “One of the reasons it works so well in Finland is that they have an ethic where they don’t believe their neighbors would do anything to harm them, or the environment.” Americans have a long history of distrust of the nuclear industry and, especially in recent years, have been increasingly suspicious of both the government and one another. Certain aspects of our political system — such as the power of states — pose additional hurdles.

Though Isaacs considers San Onofre’s storage “perfectly safe,” he does agree that the status quo — with the spent fuel languishing at sites scattered across the country, in communities that didn’t sign up to host it — is undesirable. “We know what we have to do. We know we have to do it,” he says. “We’re the ones who created the waste; we’re the ones who benefited. We need to not simply pass this off to future generations and say, ‘Look, this is your problem.’ ”

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Problem: Hanford nuclear waste solution</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://crosscut.com/environment/2022/04/hanford-report-reveals-problem-nuclear-waste-solution">https://crosscut.com/environment/2022/04/hanford-report-reveals-problem-nuclear-waste-solution</a>
GIST	<p>Fourteen years behind its original deadline, the Hanford Nuclear Reservation is scheduled to begin turning radioactive wastes into benign glass in 2023.</p> <p>However, an internal federal document said the preparatory process for this work will produce toxic vapors from a substance called acetonitrile, which would be unsafe for workers and people and animals that live nearby.</p> <p>In fact, that complication has not been studied, said the U.S. Department of Energy report dated Aug. 27, 2021.</p> <p>On March 2, 2022, the Washington State Department of Ecology sent a message to the U.S. Department of Energy, asking for answers on this issue. That came after the state agency received a March 1 letter on the matter from the Seattle-based watchdog organization Hanford Challenge, which obtained the internal document.</p>



As of Friday, the state has not received a reply from the DOE. And DOE's Hanford headquarters declined to provide anyone to discuss the matter with Crosscut. A spokesperson wrote in an email that the issue has been resolved, but did not provide any details.

In emails, the DOE and major contractor Washington River Protection Services, which designed the glassification equipment, both said the public can ask questions about this matter at a May 10 public hearing related to permits for acetonitrile-related equipment at the glassification plant. But neither the federal government nor its contractor would elaborate on the internal memo that raised concerns about acetonitrile, which will be used to re-treat the nuclear waste before it is turned into glass logs.

Written public comment is being accepted through June 4.

Acetonitrile, which exists in liquid and vapor forms, is easily ignited by heat, sparks or flames. When ignited, it gives off hydrogen cyanide fumes and potentially flammable vapors. Short-term effects from exposure can range from eye, nose and lung irritation to heart irregularities and death. Long-term, exposure could enlarge the thyroid gland and damage the liver, lungs, kidneys and the central nervous system.

The Hanford Nuclear Reservation was created in late 1942 to create plutonium for America's atomic bombs in World War II and the Cold War. Producing plutonium required nuclear reactors and massive radioactive chemical extraction plants. The worst of the radioactive wastes from those facilities ended up as liquids, sludge and gunk in 177 leak-prone underground tanks on the 586-square-mile complex along the Columbia River in Benton County in south-central Washington. These tanks hold 56 million gallons of waste on what is arguably the most radioactively and chemically contaminated spot in the Western Hemisphere. The site's overall cleanup began in 1989.

Hanford's longtime master plan has been to convert those wastes into benign glass. Originally, glassification was supposed to begin in 2009 and completed by 2021 at a cost of \$4 billion. Numerous budget, technical and engineering problems have bumped the price to \$17 billion, with glassification to begin in late 2023 and end by 2069.

The first glassification facility is scheduled to start its work glassifying the least radioactive wastes in late 2023. Dubbed the "direct-feed low-activity-waste" plant, or DFLAW. It will glassify the least radioactive and least complex of the tank wastes following some preprocessing of the material. That pretreatment and acetonitrile are the subject of the 2021 memo.

While Washington River Protection Solutions did computer-model testing on the possibility of a liquid acetonitrile leak during the pre-treatment process, it did not calculate for the possibility of acetonitrile vapors, according to the internal DOE memo.

"WRPS designers stated they performed modeling to observe the effects of a hypothetical spill from the condensate tank but did not perform any modeling or calculations to determine the effect of a vapor leak," the internal DOE memo said.

The memo said the acetonitrile vapor concentrations could reach from 49,910 parts per million up to 463,343 parts per million at different parts of the pre-processing facility.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention both put the safety threshold for acetonitrile vapors at 170 parts per million. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration has a maximum permissible exposure limit of 40 parts per million, while The American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists has set a threshold of 20 parts per million for acetonitrile vapors, the DOE memo said.

"This is really toxic stuff. (Acetonitrile) is known to be dangerous in fairly small amounts. ... If this gas in concentrations would escape, it would affect nearby workers," said Tom Carpenter, who stepped down April 1 as executive director of Hanford Challenge.



Carpenter noted that the secondary wastes -- which could contain acetonitrile in the materials — would be trucked at least 12 miles from central Hanford to a facility in northern Richland to be mixed with a cement-like substance known as grout. He said the facility — owned and operated by Perma-Fix — is located within five miles of an estimated 30,000 Tri-Citians. That includes the huge Pacific Northwest National Laboratory less than a mile away, a high school and Washington State University’s Tri-Cities campus a couple miles away, and a significant number of homes.

Perma-Fix treats low-level radioactive and mixed chemical-radioactive wastes from across the nation.

In March, the Washington Department of Ecology sent a series of questions and comments to DOE about various aspects of the DFLAW project, including several questions about the concerns over significant amounts of acetonitrile vapors wafting into the air. So far, DOE has not responded to those questions, said ecology department spokesman Ryan Miller.

“No one mentions this document. No one mentions the worker exposure issues. ... As far as I’m concerned, DOE hid this document (the August 2021 memo) from disclosure,” Carpenter said.

Meanwhile, Carpenter also criticized Perma-Fix’s safety record, specifically pointing to two on-site fires involving hazardous materials in 2019. In 2020, Hanford Challenge published a report critical of Perma-Fix’s safety records in the 21st century, of which the two 2019 fires were the most recent incidents.

Citing information made to state and federal agencies, the Hanford Challenge report said one of the fires happened at Perma-Fix when some hot glassified radioactive material from Chicago ended up on a wood pallet, which caught fire.

Hanford Challenge quoted a Washington Ecology Department report that said: “The fire at Perma-Fix Northwest could have been catastrophic, as the fire alarms were not working, and hourly fire inspections (in place of the fire alarms) were not being performed when the fire occurred.” Additionally, Perma-Fix stated there are no fire sprinkler systems installed at the facility due to potential radiological contamination issues.

Then in December 2019, Perma-Fix notified the EPA that its staff found and extinguished a small fire inside a metal box of low-level, non-hazardous depleted uranium waste from a national laboratory near San Francisco. Hanford Challenge quoted DOE research that: “Solid uranium, either as chips or dust, is a very dangerous fire hazard.”

Carpenter also criticized DOE for not having a plan for disposing of grouted secondary waste produced by Perma-Fix. “They don’t have a disposal pathway for acetonitrile,” he said.

Perma-Fix spokesman David Waldman responded to emailed questions to the company, saying “Currently, we do not have a request to treat the waste you mentioned, so we cannot comment any further.”

Waldman wrote: “The fires you mentioned were very minor incidents. The fires were managed by our own staff and fully disclosed to our regulators, as required. We had no injuries to our employees; no escape from hazardous materials; no damage to the building; and our fully trained and experienced staff professionally managed the situation. The Richland fire department responded only as a precaution to one of the fires, but just to confirm that everything was under control.”

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Russia using weapons smuggled by Iran</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/russia-using-weapons-smuggled-by-iran-from-iraq-against-ukraine">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/russia-using-weapons-smuggled-by-iran-from-iraq-against-ukraine</a>

Russia is receiving munitions and military hardware sourced from Iraq for its war effort in Ukraine with the help of Iranian weapons smuggling networks, according to members of Iranian-backed Iraqi militias and regional intelligence services with knowledge of the process.

RPGs and anti-tank missiles, as well as Brazilian-designed rocket launcher systems, have been dispatched to Russia from Iraq as Moscow's campaign has faltered in the last month, the Guardian has learned.

An Iranian-made Bavar 373 missile system, similar to the Russian S-300, has also been donated to Moscow by the authorities in Tehran, who also returned an S-300, according to a source who helped organise the transport.

Using the weapons-trafficking underworld would signal a dramatic shift in Russian strategy, as Moscow is forced to lean on Iran, its military ally in Syria, following new sanctions triggered by the invasion of Ukraine.

The developments also have huge implications for the direction and volume of trade in the international weapons trafficking business.

Iraq has hosted US and western troops since the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and the US has trained and supplied various Iraqi army and special forces units to defend the Baghdad government against insurgencies. After two decades of war, the country is awash with weaponry.

Much of it has passed legally into the hands of Iran-backed Shia militias, which are opposed to the US presence in the country, but since 2016 have been officially incorporated into the Iraqi armed forces as part of the fight against Islamic State.

Known for their efficiency in dismantling Islamic State's "caliphate" – and for their brutal treatment of Sunni civilians – these groups have become powerful actors in Iraq's security establishment.

RPGs (rocket-propelled grenades) and anti-tank missiles in the possession of Hashd al-Shaabi, the most powerful Shia militia umbrella, were transported to Iran through the Salamja border crossing on 26 March, where they were received by the Iranian military and taken on to Russia by sea, said a commander of the militia branch that controls the crossing.

Hashd al-Shaabi also dismantled and sent in pieces two Brazilian-designed Astros II rocket launcher systems, known in Iraq as the licence-built version Sajil-60, to Iran on 1 April, according to a source within the organisation.

"We don't care where the heavy weapons go [because we don't need them at the moment]," one Hashd al-Shaabi source said. "Whatever is anti-US makes us happy."

Three cargo ships capable of carrying such loads – two Russian flagged and one Iranian flagged – crossed the Caspian Sea from Iran's port of Bandar Anzali to Astrakhan, a Russian city on the Volga delta, within the timeframes outlined.

"What the Russians need in Ukraine right now is missiles. These require skill to transport as they're fragile and explosive, but if you are committed to doing it, it's possible," said Yörük Işık, an Istanbul-based maritime affairs expert. "It's also not the kind of activity that would be picked up by satellite imagery as they can be transported in large boxes and regular shipping containers."

Mohaned Hage Ali, a fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, said: "That kind of sophisticated weaponry [rocket launcher systems] would make a big difference on the ground in Ukraine. Hashd al-Shaabi controls much of the border region with Iran, which would make this transaction easier.

“Other countries such as China are having to be very careful about giving weapons to Russia now, given the new sanctions situation. And Iran, as part of that axis, wants to make sure Russia doesn’t lose ground in this conflict.

“If the Putin regime is destabilised that has huge implications for Iran, particularly in Syria, where Damascus is dependent on Russian air support and Russia coordinates to avoid direct conflict between them and Israel.”

Extensive economic sanctions imposed on Moscow by western nations since the 24 February invasion have included bans on dual-use goods – items with a civilian and a military purpose – such as spare parts for vehicles and certain types of electronics and optical devices, as well as items with obvious military uses.

Russian manufacturers have reportedly been hit hard by the new restrictions, with Ukraine saying that the country’s main armoured vehicle plant, as well as a tractor factory, have run out of parts for making and repairing tanks.

Revised western estimates are that 29 of Russia’s original battalion tactical groups are now “combat non-ineffective” from an invading force that is estimated at 125 battalions, or about 75% of Russia’s total army, in the six-week-old “special military operation”.

The significant losses have yielded few gains: Moscow for now appears to have abandoned its initial attempt to seize the capital, Kyiv, instead drawing down and repositioning its ground forces for a renewed assault on the Donbas region, in the south-east of the country.

Airstrikes and artillery assaults are expected to continue on the cities of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv as well as the besieged port of Mariupol.

Last week, the Ukrainian intelligence services accused Georgia of helping Russia receive sanctioned military materiel, in another potential sign of the scale of the Kremlin’s new efforts to use international smuggling networks to aid its campaign in Ukraine.

Georgian special services received instructions from the country’s political leadership not to interfere with smuggling channels from “east Asia” designed to circumvent new western sanctions, Kyiv’s intelligence directorate said in a statement.

Georgian officials said the Ukrainian claims were baseless. Relations between the two post-Soviet nations have sharply deteriorated since the conflict broke out over the pro-Russian government in Tbilisi’s refusal to impose economic sanctions on Moscow.

US officials have also said that Russia has asked China for military-grade weapons and aid in support of its Ukraine operation.

Russian ally Serbia took the delivery of a Chinese anti-aircraft system in a secretive operation over the weekend, the Associated Press reported, amid western concerns of an arms buildup in the Balkans at the same time as the war in Ukraine which could threaten the fragile peace in the region.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Mariupol defenders running out of ammo</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/ukraine-last-marines-defending-mariupol-running-out-of-ammunition">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/ukraine-last-marines-defending-mariupol-running-out-of-ammunition</a>
GIST	The last Ukrainian soldiers defending Mariupol said they were “running out of ammunition” on Monday and expected to be killed or taken prisoner very soon by Russian forces surrounding the city.

[Writing on Facebook](#), the 36th brigade said its 47-day defence of Mariupol was coming to a tragic conclusion.

“We were bombed from airplanes and shot at by artillery and tanks. We have been doing everything possible and impossible. But any resource has the potential to run out,” it said.

Russian troops have been besieging the city on the Sea of Azov since the beginning of March. The territory controlled by Ukrainian forces has gradually shrunk to a few central areas. The surviving marines are now holed up in the Azovstal iron and steelworks next to the port.

“The enemy gradually pushed us back. They surrounded us with fire, and are now trying to destroy us,” the marines posted. The “mountain of wounded” amounted to nearly half of the brigade, they added, with those “whose limbs are not torn off” continuing to fight.

Their infantry soldiers had all been killed. The “shootings battles” against the Russians were now being conducted by artillerymen and anti-aircraft gunners, as well as radio operators, drivers and cooks. Even musicians from the orchestra were fighting, they said.

The desperate last bulletin came as Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Russia had “destroyed” Mariupol. “There are tens of thousands of dead. Even despite this the Russians are not stopping their offensive,” he told South Korea’s parliament.

Zelenskiy said it was too soon for Ukraine to declare it had won the battle for Kyiv, given the scale of the suffering of civilians living in Russian-occupied areas in the capital’s garden suburbs.

“Bucha, Irpin, Hostomel – if the people of those [towns] were wiped out, then did we win this battle? I’m not sure. We’ve withstood, and we did not give up what is ours. But whether we won, I can’t say,” he told CBS News.

The exact number of residents killed in Mariupol is unlikely to be known. Its Ukrainian-controlled council said the Russians had been collecting bodies – many of them lying in shattered streets – and incinerating them in a mobile crematorium.

After failing to seize Kyiv, Russia has refocused its military efforts on the eastern Donbas region. When Mariupol falls, Russian tactical battalions are expected to advance north and to try to link up with other military columns moving south from the city of Iyzum and the Kharkiv region.

Western officials said they expected Russia to try to “double or perhaps even treble” its forces in Donbas as it shifts forces from Kyiv and elsewhere in the coming weeks.

The first of those forces had begun to redeploy via Belarus, but the whole exercise would take “some considerable time” and it was unclear how many units could be effectively brought back into battle.

Ukraine’s defence ministry said a full-scale Kremlin attack is likely. “They have almost finished their preparations. We expect an offensive in the near future,” spokesman Oleksandr Motuzyanyk told the Guardian. Asked if the Russians could encircle Ukraine’s defending eastern army, he replied: “We are not going to let this happen.”

Ukraine’s high command faces an urgent tactical dilemma. Several Russian battalions retreated late last month from the Kyiv region to Belarus. Some are now making the long journey via Belgorod on the Russian side of the border, to redeploy into the south-east of Ukraine.

Other units have stayed put. If Kyiv moves the bulk of its forces to the Donetsk and Luhansk territories, this would leave the capital exposed to a second surprise Russian attack from Belarus.

In their message, the marines in Mariupol also say they feel “written off” by their commander in chief. They say repeated promises to relieve the crushing Russian blockade of the city, or to evacuate some of their wounded by helicopter, came to nothing. “There were chances. Due to silliness they were not implemented,” the brigade wrote.

Like Mariupol’s trapped civilian population, the soldiers have been living in hellish conditions. “For more than a month, we fought without resupplying our ammunition, without food, without water,” the marines posted, adding that they were forced to drink water from puddles.

The message ends: “It’s death for some of us, and captivity for the rest. Do not talk badly about the Marines. For we are FAITHFUL FOREVER!”

Russia has claimed it targeted Ukrainian air defence systems in airstrikes overnight on Sunday which completely destroyed the airport in the eastern city of Dnipro. Another attack wounded five people in the town of Zvonetsky, according to Ukrainian officials.

Emergency workers were also combing through an infrastructure facility in Zvonetsky that was attacked on Monday. Valentyn Reznichenko, governor of the Dnipropetrovsk region, said casualty figures would be given at a later point.

Reznichenko earlier said that the Dnipro attack had wounded one person, while rockets had sparked a fire that was eventually put out. A missile had also hit a building in the Pavlohrad district, he added.

Separately, the head of the Dnipro region council, Mykola Lukashuk, said five staff members of the state emergency service had been wounded by the strike on the airport.

Russia said that it had targeted an S-300 air defence missile system transported to Ukraine by Slovenia last week, a claim denied by Slovenia. Kyiv has repeatedly begged its western allies for long-range air defence systems to help it against the Russian invasion.

Dnipro, an industrial city home to 1 million people, has become a vital reception point for Ukrainians from farther east who have been told to evacuate in the face of both Russian advances on the ground and intensifying airstrikes and artillery attacks.

There seems little prospect Moscow will stop its Ukraine invasion anytime soon. Russia’s foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said negotiation talks with Ukraine would continue, but stressed in an interview with Itar-Tass there will be no pause in hostilities until a final agreement is reached and signed.

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HEADLINE	04/11 Sweden, Finland in move to join NATO
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/sweden-and-finland-make-moves-to-join-nato">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/sweden-and-finland-make-moves-to-join-nato</a>
GIST	<p>Sweden’s ruling party has begun debating whether the country should join Nato, and neighbouring Finland expects to reach a decision within weeks, as Moscow warned that the Nordic nations’ accession would “not bring stability” to Europe.</p> <p>Both countries are officially non-aligned militarily, but public support for Nato membership has almost doubled since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, to about 50% in Sweden and 60% in Finland, multiple opinion polls suggest.</p> <p>Sweden’s centre-left Social Democrats, led by prime minister Magdalena Andersson, said their “security review” was about more than just joining the 30-nation alliance, adding that the party could decide to apply even without the backing of members.</p>

Having stressed at the outbreak of the war that non-alignment had “served Sweden’s interests well”, Andersson said she was “ready to discuss” the policy in light of Moscow’s aggression, and in late March said she “did not rule out” joining Nato.

“When Russia invaded Ukraine, Sweden’s security position changed fundamentally,” the party said in a statement on Monday. The Social Democrat general secretary, Tobias Baudin, said the security review would be complete “before the summer”.

The question is expected to be a key issue in parliamentary elections due on 11 September, with centre-right opposition parties already saying they would back a Nato application and the far-right Sweden Democrats also open to the idea.

Finland, which shares a 1,340km (830-mile) border with Russia and, like Sweden, is a Nato partner after abandoning its position of strict neutrality at the end of the cold war, is expected to outline its decision regarding the alliance before midsummer.

Alexander Stubb, a former prime minister of Finland, told AFP it was “a foregone conclusion” that Helsinki would apply to join Nato, probably in time for a June Nato summit in Madrid.

A government-commissioned national security review is due to be delivered to parliament next week to help Finnish MPs decide on the question before they vote, with one recent poll suggesting only six of the country’s 200 MPs were opposed.

“We will have very careful discussions, but not taking any more time than we have to,” the country’s prime minister, Sanna Marin, said last week. “I think we will end the discussion before midsummer,” she said.

Both countries have received public assurances from the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, that their applications would be welcome, as well as expressions of support from several members including the US, UK, Germany, France and Turkey.

But the move would almost certainly be seen as a provocation by the Kremlin, whose spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said on Monday that the alliance was “a tool geared towards confrontation” and that their possible accession “will not bring stability to the European continent”.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Russian opposition activist detained</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/prominent-russian-opposition-activist-detained-in-moscow">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/prominent-russian-opposition-activist-detained-in-moscow</a>
GIST	<p>A prominent Russian opposition activist and outspoken critic of the invasion of Ukraine has been detained in Moscow, his lawyer told the independent news outlet Sota on Monday evening.</p> <p>Vladimir Kara-Murza, 40, is a veteran Kremlin critic who says he was deliberately poisoned in Moscow in 2015 and 2017 as retaliation for his lobbying efforts to impose US and EU sanctions against Russian officials accused of human rights abuses. A close friend of the opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, who was shot and killed in 2015, Kara-Murza nearly died from kidney failure in the first incident.</p> <p>His longtime lawyer, Vadim Prokhorov, said Kara-Murza had been arrested late on Monday on charges of disobeying police orders, and faced up to 15 days in jail or a small fine.</p> <p>It was not immediately clear if Kara-Murza’s arrest was linked to his opposition to Russia’s actions in Ukraine, but it comes amid an unprecedented crackdown on independent media and anti-war dissent. Last month, the Russian parliament passed a law imposing a jail term of up to 15 years for spreading intentionally “fake” news about the military.</p> <p>Kara-Murza, who studied at Cambridge university, has been a vocal opponent of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, launching an anti-war committee with other Russian leading opposition figures. He has also</p>



been one of the few prominent opposition figures still living in Russia, as many have fled the country out of safety concerns after the jailing last year of Alexei Navalny.

Aleksandr Podrabinek, a former Soviet dissident who went to the Khamovniki police station on Monday to support Kara-Murza, told Sota that he believed he had been detained because the authorities were “angered by his courage”.

Hours prior to his detainment, Kara-Murza appeared on CNN where he described the Kremlin as a “regime of murderers”.

“I have absolutely no doubt that the Putin regime will end over this war in Ukraine, doesn’t mean it’s gonna happen tomorrow. The two main questions are time and price and by price, I do not mean monetary – I mean the price of human blood and human lives and it has already been horrendous, but the Putin regime will end over this and there will be a democratic Russia after Putin,” Kara-Murza said.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Day 48 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-48-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-48-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ukrainian president Volodymyr <b>Zelenskiy voiced concerns that Russian forces could use chemical weapons in Ukraine</b> but did not confirm whether they had been used in his daily <a href="#">video address</a> late on Monday. “Today, the occupiers issued a new statement, which testifies to their preparation for a new stage of terror against Ukraine and our defenders,” he said. “One of the mouthpieces of the occupiers stated that they could use chemical weapons against the defenders of Mariupol. We take this as seriously as possible.”</li><li>Earlier on Monday evening, <b>Ukrainian authorities claimed Russia dropped a drone carrying a toxic substance on the south-eastern city of Mariupol</b>. Ivanna Klympush, a Ukrainian MP and chair of the parliamentary committee on integration of Ukraine to the EU, said the unknown substance was “most likely” chemical weapons. The reports are so far unconfirmed.</li><li>The <b>Ukrainian Azov Regiment</b>, a unit of the National Guard of <a href="#">Ukraine</a>, accused Russia of using <b>chemical weapons of an “unknown origin”, dropped via an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)</b> on civilians in Mariupol. Azov leader Andriy Biletsky told the <a href="#">Kyiv Independent</a> that three people had signs of chemical poisoning but there appears to be no “disastrous consequences” for their health.</li><li><b>UK foreign secretary Liz Truss</b> said work was underway to verify details of the alleged attack, adding: “Any use of such weapons would be a callous escalation in this conflict and we will hold Putin and his regime to account.” <b>Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby</b> added that he was aware of the reports but “cannot confirm at this time”.</li><li><b>More than 10,000 civilians have died in Mariupol</b>, the city’s mayor has said. Vadym Boychenko said the death toll could surpass 20,000, as weeks of attacks and privation leave bodies “carpeted through the streets” in an interview with the Associated Press.</li><li><b>Zelenskiy partly blamed the Ukrainian loss of life on western nations that had not sent weapons</b> to bolster the war effort. “Unfortunately, we are not getting as much as we need to end this war sooner,” he said. “Time is being lost. The lives of Ukrainians are being lost ... And this is also the responsibility of those who still keep the weapons Ukraine needs in their armoury.”</li><li><b>Ukrainian authorities are warning people not to go near what they say are landmines being dropped on Kharkiv</b>. Zelenskiy also spoke of “hundreds of thousands of dangerous objects” including mines and unexploded shells left by Russian forces in regions in Ukraine’s north.</li><li><b>The gruesome task of exhuming the bodies of Ukrainian victims from mass graves in Bucha</b> on the outskirts of Kyiv started on Monday. More than 5,800 cases of alleged war crimes against Russian forces are under investigation, Iryna Venediktova, Ukraine’s prosecutor general, told CNN.</li><li><b>Nearly two-thirds of all Ukrainian children have fled their homes</b> in the six weeks since Russia’s invasion, and the UN has verified the <b>deaths of 142 children</b>, though the number is almost certainly much higher, the UN children’s agency said Monday.</li></ul>

- **The United Nations has increasingly heard accounts of rape and sexual violence** in [Ukraine](#) and called for an investigation into violence against women and increased protection for Ukrainian children. Sima Bahous, UN Women executive director, told the UN security council: “The combination of mass displacement with the large pressure results of conscripts and mercenaries and the brutality displayed against Ukrainian civilians has raised all red flags.”
- **Ukraine’s ombudswoman for human rights said she had recorded horrific acts of sexual violence by Russian troops in Bucha** and elsewhere, including a case in which women and girls were kept in a basement for 25 days, the New York Times reported. Nine of those victims are now pregnant, according to the ombudswoman, Lyudmyla Denisova.
- **Three people were killed and eight civilians wounded by Russian strikes in Ukraine’s Donetsk region**, the region’s governor Pavlo Kyrylenko said in a post on the Telegram messaging app.
- **Ukraine’s eastern city of Kharkiv came under heavy shelling on Monday, resulting in multiple casualties, mayor Ihor Terekhov said.** Among the casualties in Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, was the death of one child, the region’s mayor said.
- **Prominent Russian opposition activist Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr** [has been detained in Moscow](#) on charges of disobeying police orders, his lawyer told the independent news outlet Sota Vision on Monday evening.
- **France’s foreign ministry has declared six more Russian agents “operating under diplomatic cover” as persona non grata.** The six agents are being accused of working against France’s “national interest” after an investigation, Reuters reports.
- **Russian forces are focusing on the Donbas region, the US Pentagon said, but have not launched an offensive yet.** “They’re repositioning, they’re refocusing on the Donbas,” Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby told reporters. Western officials said they expected [Russia](#) to try to “double or perhaps even treble” its forces in Donbas as it shifts forces from Kyiv and elsewhere in the coming weeks.
- **The Austrian chancellor, Karl Nehammer, held “direct, open and tough” talks with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in Moscow on Monday.** In a statement, Nehammer – the first EU leader to meet with Putin since he ordered his troops to invade Ukraine – was quoted as saying that it was “not a friendly meeting”.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 New war phase: no obvious end fighting</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/new-phase-of-ukraine-war-brings-no-obvious-route-to-end-fighting">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/11/new-phase-of-ukraine-war-brings-no-obvious-route-to-end-fighting</a>
GIST	<p>How does the war end in <a href="#">Ukraine</a>? At the moment it is far from obvious – which is why both sides are girding for a trial of strength in Donbas after Russia was forced to abandon its attempt to capture Kyiv.</p> <p>Russia’s current military activity appears to back up what are in effect reduced war aims: targeting the entire Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts claimed by the so-called separatist republics, both recognised by Vladimir Putin just before the war broke out.</p> <p>An eight-mile convoy, spotted on Friday by satellite imagery, 50 miles east of Kharkiv, is likely to be heading for Izyum, once again bringing to mind one of the early images of the war. Russian forces have been, for several days already, trying to push from Izyum south to Slavyansk, but not so far making much progress.</p> <p>Tracey German, a professor in the defence studies department at King’s College London, said Russia may have already increased the number of battalions in eastern Ukraine “from 30 to 40 in recent days” – and a single front “may be more achievable and could provide Putin with something that can be depicted as a victory”.</p>

The belief in the west is that Russia can “double or perhaps even treble” its forces in the Donbas, potentially a decisive shift in Moscow’s favour. Already Russia has stepped up preliminary operations, bombing the quickest supply lines for the forces dug in in the area.

The airport in Dnipro, the largest city behind the defensive lines, was destroyed by a Russian attack over the weekend, the local governor acknowledged, while Friday’s [cruel missile strike on the railway station in Kramatorsk](#), an attack that killed more than 50 people, was also intended to disrupt Ukrainian manoeuvrability.

Moscow’s problem is whether its already battered forces can carry out the task: 37-38 of its battalions are “combat non-effective” after being harried around Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy, according to an estimate from western intelligence on Monday. That leaves Moscow with a total fighting force about 90 battalions strong. At full strength each battalion should have about 800 troops.

Elsewhere in the east, Russian forces are getting edging closer to seizing control of Mariupol, cutting the city into two on Sunday, [according to the Institute of the Study of War](#), at a high cost to the attackers and a far more fearful cost to its citizens.

“Tens of thousands are dead,” Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, estimated on Monday, in a speech to the South Korean parliament, although the grim struggle for control of the port city has further demonstrated to Moscow it cannot capture any more of Ukraine’s population centres without high casualties to its own forces.

For Ukraine, the problem of the current phase is acute, if no longer existential. Kyiv has shown it can mount effective counterattacks against overextended Russian mechanised forces with western anti-tank weapons – but its forces are also depleted and have not been able to push the Russians back far, if at all, in the south and east.

Its focus in the first instance will be trying to stem the Russian advance, to avoid its forces being enveloped in Donbas, and instead grind Russia to a something like a stalemate as both sides become increasingly exhausted after what would be more than two months of fighting.

That would nevertheless leave Ukraine largely cut off from the sea, and Russia with a land bridge from Donetsk to Crimea. Ukraine may not be demilitarised as Putin demanded, but its economy is nevertheless devastated, shrunk by an estimated 45% this year, according to the World Bank.

President Zelenskiy, however, has repeatedly demanded more and better weapons from the west as he hopes to turn stalemate into victory. So far what’s been offered – in public at least – is not enough to turn the military balance, such as a dozen T-72 tanks from the Czech Republic, 10 Switchblade 600 drones from the US or 120 armoured vehicles from the UK.

The question for the west, for whom Ukraine is effectively fighting a proxy war, is whether to step up supplies so that Kyiv can turn the tide on land, force Russian forces out of Kherson near the mouth of Dnieper River in the south, and drive the invaders back elsewhere in the Donbas.

The refusal to supply Russian-designed fighter jets from eastern-bloc Nato members suggests the US, in particular, is nervous not just about provoking an unpredictable Kremlin but also about altering the balance too far. A tipping point could be whether Poland is allowed to supply about 100 Russian T-72 tanks it has in its arsenal.

It may be a difficult balance to strike. Do Ukraine’s western allies want to give Putin a bloody nose, or simply try to provide enough arms in the hope of forcing a return to the positions before fighting broke out on 24 February? If Ukraine were in a stronger military position, Kyiv might seek to reclaim the Donbas territories occupied since 2014 – where Moscow’s defence may be fiercer.

HEADLINE	04/11 Women face chronic violence Syria camps
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/11/women-forced-into-survival-sex-in-syria-widow-camps">https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/apr/11/women-forced-into-survival-sex-in-syria-widow-camps</a>
GIST	<p>Women and children living in some of the hardest-to-reach camps in north-west Syria face chronic and high levels of violence and depression, with some women forced to engage in “survival sex”, a <a href="#">new report</a> has revealed.</p> <p>Children in so-called “widow camps” have been found to be severely neglected, abused and forced to work while mothers are at “breaking point” psychologically. More than 80% of women say they do not have adequate healthcare and 95% expressed feelings of hopelessness.</p> <p>About 34% of children said that they have experienced one or more forms of violence and 2% said they married young. Child labour is a big problem with 58% of boys and 49% of girls aged 11 or older forced to work.</p> <p>Of the 419 people interviewed by the NGO <a href="#">World Vision</a> in 28 camps, home to tens of thousands of single women – including those who are divorced or whose husbands are missing – and their children, approximately one in four women said they had witnessed sexual abuse in the camp on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. About 9% of respondents said they themselves had been sexually abused.</p> <p>Women are not allowed to freely leave the camps, said the NGO. Unable to seek paid employment or support their families, some find they have “no choice” but to engage in so-called survival sex with male guards and camp managers.</p> <p>Alexandra Matei, a lead author of the report, said: “We are seeing the world, rightly, express solidarity with the victims of the conflict in Ukraine and governments generously committed to do whatever it takes to meet the humanitarian needs there. But Syrian widows and their children deserve the same level of empathy, compassion and commitment. Their pain, their desperation, their need is no less than anyone else who is fleeing conflict.”</p> <p>Fatima (not her real name), a mother of three in one of the camps, suffers from severe back pain but is unable to access healthcare.</p> <p>“We do not even have bread and water,” she said. “When [children] ask for bananas, I ask them to be patient. There is nothing we can do. Water and bread are more important.”</p> <p>She said it was not safe for women and girls to go to the mountain to fetch wood to heat themselves or cook.</p> <p>“It is not safe at all. I have to take my neighbour or anyone with me just to not go alone. I cannot send my children on their own either, because it is not safe. I do not have anyone.”</p> <p>Nearly 7 million Syrians have been displaced internally <a href="#">since conflict erupted in 2011</a>. About 2.8 million are living in an <a href="#">estimated 1,300 camps for internally displaced people</a> in the north-west of the country.</p> <p>Widow camps in Idlib and Aleppo are managed by the Syrian opposition and the Turkish military. Conditions there are deemed “drastically” worse than in general camps. There is little or no delivery of essential services for residents, who are experiencing what aid workers have described as “a shocking crisis within a crisis” and “the worst of the worst” protection challenges. Access has been restricted to local NGOs.</p> <p>World Vision’s report comes before the government pledging conference on Syria in Brussels in May. Funding has dropped to its lowest level since 2015 due to what the report said was “donor fatigue and Covid-19”. Less than half of the Syria humanitarian response plan was met last year. More than 14 million Syrians were in need of some form of aid as of last month, <a href="#">according to the UN</a>.</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 Survey: 2/3 <sup>rd</sup> Seattle voters consider leaving
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3432020/two-thirds-seattle-voters-considered-leaving-city-survey/">https://mynorthwest.com/3432020/two-thirds-seattle-voters-considered-leaving-city-survey/</a>
GIST	<p>Seattle voters have grown even more frustrated with the state of the city over the past several months, with 67-percent of voters surveyed admitting they had actively thought about leaving the city.</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>The bulk of them feel Seattle is headed in the wrong direction and most no longer trust the city to spend their tax dollars wisely.</p> <p>That's the gist of the second installment of the Seattle Metro Chamber of Commerce sponsored survey The Index. The first was conducted in August and showed voters' top concern was homelessness.</p> <p>That remains the same in this second survey, which also saw a significant increase in voters worried about the second top issue in the March poll – public safety.</p> <p>The Index is a research project measuring quality of life over time by asking registered Seattle voters about the region's most pressing issues, including homelessness, public safety, affordability, and downtown Seattle's recovery.</p> <p>Among the major findings in this second installment is a dramatic increase in the number of voters concerned about public safety with more than half of registered voters in the citywide survey mentioning that issue as a concern. There was also an increase in concern about affordability compared to the August survey.</p> <p>"The voice of Seattle voters is crystal clear: we are united on the most pressing issues, we are united on the solutions, and we are united in our need to address them with urgency," said Rachel Smith, president and CEO of the Seattle Metro Chamber. "While some of the numbers in this research are tough to see, I have a great deal of optimism because the voters have laid out a clear path, one that rejects ideological binaries and embraces an 'and' approach to solutions. One that centers our values and will enhance our quality of life here for everyone. And one that the Seattle Metro Chamber is ready to get to work on."</p> <p>Some key findings from the new installment of <a href="#">The Index</a>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When asked about the issues facing Seattle that voters are most frustrated or concerned about, the number of voters citing crime/drugs/public safety grew by 17 points since Index 1 in August 2021, from 28 to 46 percent.</li> <li>• When asked if voters have actively considered moving out of Seattle, the number of "yes" responses grew by 7 percent since August (67 percent total), and public safety is the second most-cited reason, following the expensive cost of living and cost of housing in the city.</li> <li>• Now, 91 percent of Seattle voters say Downtown Seattle cannot fully recover until the homelessness crisis and public safety problems are addressed.</li> <li>• There is near-universal agreement on expanding state and regional partnerships to address homelessness, and on investing more in behavioral health</li> <li>• Voters strongly preferred providing outreach when closing encampments to a blanket just stop the sweeps approach.</li> <li>• An increasing number of voters say they would not feel safe visiting downtown both during the day and at night, and three-quarters say their own neighborhood feels less safe compared to two years ago.</li> <li>• The top five issues voters say would have the biggest impact on improving quality of life mirror their top concerns. Three of those top-fives are public safety-related: addressing violent crime, gun violence, property crime, and public safety concerns facing local businesses. The other two are removing tent encampments and maintaining bridges and infrastructure.</li> <li>• Workers continue to support increased density with near-universal support for making it easier to build housing and transit and commercial areas</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A supermajority support more housing in their neighborhood and changing regulations to support more density and single-family home zones.</li> <li>• Most voters are concerned about downtown’s future and concern has increased.</li> <li>• Voters continue to overwhelmingly agree that downtown is important to the region’s economic recovery and that addressing homelessness and public safety issues is essential for downtown to recover.</li> <li>• The majority of voters say they will visit downtown less often for non-work activities than they did pre-pandemic, and that percentage has increased since the August 2021 index.</li> <li>• Voters do not trust the City Council on police reform, and they strongly prefer an approach that includes fundamental reform and hiring more officers rather than defunding and decriminalizing non-violent misdemeanors</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Mexico voters back president to stay office</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/americas/mexico-president-recall-election.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/americas/mexico-president-recall-election.html</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — Pitched by the president as a landmark exercise for Mexico’s democracy, Sunday’s recall referendum gave voters the chance to remove their head of state from office for the first time.</p> <p>But with President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s popularity still high and the opposition largely boycotting the event, the results of the referendum were almost assured.</p> <p>Instead, like so much in the country’s polarized politics these days, the vote became one more trench from which each side of the political spectrum could do battle.</p> <p>On Sunday, almost 18 percent of the electorate cast their ballot, far less than was needed for the result to become binding, making the outcome largely symbolic.</p> <p>But more than 90 percent of those who did turn out voted in favor of the president completing his six-year term, according to preliminary results from Mexico’s electoral watchdog.</p> <p>Coming out of the referendum, the president and his backers will be able to point to the overwhelming support for Mr. López Obrador and his political project among his base, even at a moment of weakness. The president has struggled to follow through on key campaign promises, with his approval rating slipping to 59 percent last month from 66 percent in December, according to a poll from El Economista newspaper.</p> <p>Although Mr. López Obrador fell far short of the 40 percent participation required to make the results count, marshaling more than 15 million people across the country to vote in his favor underscores his ability to mobilize his base at a time when his government’s achievements are under scrutiny.</p> <p>“More than 15 million Mexicans are happy and want me to continue until September 2024,” Mr. López Obrador said in a video message published shortly after preliminary results were announced. “We are going to continue with the transformation of our country.”</p> <p>With the next presidential election about two years away, the recall referendum also presented an opportunity for Mr. López Obrador to test his party’s strengths and weaknesses across the country, and determine who might be best positioned to succeed him. Mr. López Obrador is limited to one six-year term by the Constitution, but as his party’s key power broker, he is expected to play a vital role in picking a successor to carry on his legacy.</p> <p>On the other side, the opposition viewed the exercise as an attempt to shore up the president’s hold on power. The president’s critics pointed to the low overall turnout as anything but a mandate for Mr. López Obrador and his efforts to transform the country.</p>



“It has been a total failure,” said Juan Romero Hicks, a congressman with the opposition National Action Party in a video message posted shortly after polls closed. “Our president lost because he doesn’t have the confidence of the people.”

Analysts said that the vote, which was executed smoothly, may actually end up bolstering the image of one of the president’s most frequent targets: Mexico’s electoral watchdog.

In the months leading up to the vote, Mr. López Obrador and his supporters lobbied a barrage of criticism at the agency for not doing enough to promote the referendum and for not setting up enough ballot boxes.

“The I.N.E. is keeping quiet in an attitude that is totally undemocratic and contrary to the Constitution,” Mr. López Obrador said at a recent news conference ahead of the referendum, using the institute’s Spanish initials. “They are hiding” the ballot boxes, he added.

The institute’s request for more funding from the federal government to oversee the vote was rejected. So, with a budget that was about half as much as what it said it needed, the watchdog set up far fewer ballot boxes than it would have in a presidential election.

“It’s a strategy to put the I.N.E. in a situation where it cannot fulfill its duties,” said Lorenzo Córdova, the leader of the electoral agency. “It’s a trap.”

But while turnout was low, it was stronger than some analysts had expected, which may strengthen the institute’s reputation and insulate it from further attacks from the president and his party.

“The undisputed winner, beyond the war of figures and narratives, is the I.N.E.,” said Carlos Bravo Regidor, a political analyst.

The fact that more than 16 million people turned out to cast their ballots could also work in the president’s favor, analysts said.

“It surpassed expectations,” said Blanca Heredia, a professor at CIDE, a research institution based in Mexico City. “I think it was a very good turnout, taking into account very unfavorable conditions for people to vote: there was no clear opponent, there was no competition.”

She added: “It was almost like a symbolic battle.”

The referendum is typical of Mr. López Obrador’s governing style. The president has spent much of his term in campaign mode, traveling the country to meet with voters and keep his base energized. In the lead-up to the 2024 elections, the recall vote has served as an opportunity to fire up his base in key battlegrounds.

There is a particular focus on Mexico City, long considered the president’s stronghold. The city’s mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, a member of his party, is widely assumed to be among the likeliest contenders for the nation’s top job after Mr. López Obrador’s term is up. But last year, the party lost several critical seats in the capital’s legislature while Ms. Sheinbaum was running the city, which was seen as a potential blow to her political future.

Although the nation’s Supreme Court has said political parties cannot advertise the recall, Ms. Sheinbaum had spent weeks furiously campaigning in support of the vote, which was seen as a chance for the mayor to recover from the party’s losses last year.

But as the initial results began rolling in, it became clear that Ms. Sheinbaum’s efforts seemed to have fallen short: Despite ubiquitous advertising and consistent promotion from the mayor, the participation rate in Mexico City was not among the top five states.

	<p>The final outcome may yet alter the political mood in Mexico, showing the president and his party which parts of the country, and which potential successors, will be most important to securing the presidency in 2024.</p> <p>But far from the seismic shift that a recall referendum of a president might have brought, this vote appears to have merely underscored the acrimony of Mexican politics. With the low turnout rendering the results nonbinding, the country's polarized political forces will instead be left to fight over the narrative that emerges from the results to try to bolster their competing claims to power.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Sikhs sue USMC over beard restrictions</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/sikh-marine-lawsuit-beard-turban.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/sikh-marine-lawsuit-beard-turban.html</a>
GIST	<p>A Marine artillery captain named Sukhbir Singh Toor has been on a mission over the past year to become the first Sikh in the United States Marine Corps allowed to openly practice his religion while in uniform.</p> <p>During that time he has won a string of victories against the strict dress standards of the Marine Corps, and he can now wear the beard, long hair and turban required of a faithful Sikh while on duty. But recently, the Marine Corps dug in, refusing to allow him or any other Sikh to wear a beard on a combat deployment or during boot camp, saying that beards would hinder the corps's ability to function and put lives at risk.</p> <p>On Monday, <a href="#">Captain Toor and three other Sikhs sued the Marine Corps</a> in U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, saying the corps's refusal to grant a religious waiver is arbitrary and discriminatory, and violates the constitutional right to free exercise of their religion.</p> <p>"I just want to move on, so I can do my job," Captain Toor, 27, said in an interview from his base in Twentynine Palms, Calif., before the suit was filed. "There is no reason I should have to sacrifice my faith in order to serve my country."</p> <p>Joining him in the lawsuit are three prospective Marine recruits who have been told they must shave their beards and cut their hair for boot camp, where all Marines receive basic training, and only afterward would be able to apply for a religious exemption.</p> <p>The lawsuit is emblematic of the larger struggle the tradition-bound military faces in trying to attract personnel in an increasingly diverse nation, while preserving practices that took root when its ranks were almost entirely white, male and Christian.</p> <p>At issue is the long-simmering tension between constitutional guarantees of individual rights and the military's need to maintain an effective fighting force that at times must impinge on those rights. The back and forth over religion has been evolving since at least 1981, when an Orthodox rabbi serving in the Air Force sued the service over the right to <a href="#">wear a skullcap</a>. Current law requires that the military not restrict individual exercise of religion except when a "compelling government interest" is at stake, and in those cases, to use the "least restrictive means" possible.</p> <p>What counts as a compelling government interest, or as the least restrictive means, is at the center of the case.</p> <p>The Marine Corps declined to comment on the lawsuit. In prior administrative decisions concerning Sikh turbans and beards, Marine leaders have cited two interests it said were compelling. One is uniform appearance in the ranks, which the corps argues is crucial to good order and discipline.</p> <p>"Uniformity is more than the mere outward expression of unity with the team; it is a tool that constantly reminds each Marine of the team to which they are committed and a signal to other Marines of the depth of that commitment," the Marine Corps said in response to Captain Toor's first request for an accommodation in June. Tampering with that commitment, it warned, could cost lives.</p>

Second, the Marine Corps has said, beards might hinder Marines' physical ability to do their duties by keeping them from safely wearing gas masks.

That is why Captain Toor and other Sikhs currently cannot wear beards when deployed in any of 39 countries that are considered potentially hostile, including Algeria, Israel, Turkey, Uganda and Cuba.

Col. Kelly Frushour, a Marine spokeswoman, said the risks in foreign deployments could change rapidly. "Accordingly, Marines in a combat zone must be prepared to don a gas mask at any time with little or no notice," she said.

In their suit, the Sikhs counter that the Marine Corps routinely deploys men to combat zones who have permission to wear beards because of medical conditions or because they [are part of Special Operations units](#). And the corps's beard rules would require the Sikhs to shave even in countries where the risk of chemical attack is so low that Marines deployed there are not equipped with gas masks.

The Army made similar safety arguments against a Sikh soldier in 2015, but relented in 2016 after the [soldier sued](#). About 100 Sikhs currently serve in the Army and Air Force wearing full beards and turbans, and many have been deployed to combat zones. In interviews, they have reported no issues.

The American military now grants more religious exemptions to uniform and grooming standards than ever before, allowing hijabs for Muslim women, long hair for [a small Christian sect](#), and beards for a few practicing [Norse Heathens](#). But the Marine Corps has for generations fought changes after other branches embraced them. It was the last service branch to [allow Black men to enlist](#), and it balked at a 2015 mandate to [allow women to serve in combat](#).

In the case of the Sikhs, the Marine Corps has dug in over more than just practical considerations. It also says beards and turbans are a potential threat to a more abstract concept of unity.

The 13 weeks of boot camp are the crucible where ordinary citizens are turned into Marines, taking away nearly all individual identity — phones, personal clothes, hair styles and even the word "I": Drill instructors force recruits to refer to themselves only as "this recruit."

"This transformative period sets the foundation for further service by breaking down individuality and training recruits to think of their team first," the Marine Corps wrote in February when it denied an accommodation for one of the prospective Sikh recruits, Aekash Singh. "Uniformity is a key component of this process. Consequently, limiting exceptions during this transformative process constitutes the least restrictive means to further the government's compelling interests."

Mr. Singh and two other prospective recruits, Jaskirat Singh and Milaap Singh Chahal, declined to be interviewed. In a statement, they said: "We remain ready to meet the high mental and physical standards of the Marine Corps because we want to serve our country alongside the best. We cannot, however, give up our right to our religious faith while doing so."

In the suit filed on Monday, their lawyers argued that the Marine Corps routinely allows other recruits into boot camp who do not fit homogeneous appearance standards. Women are allowed to keep their long hair during training, and the corps recently loosened [restrictions on tattoos](#), allowing recruits to have ink covering everything but their hands, head and neck.

The corps said the change in the tattoo policy was meant "to balance the individual desires of Marines with the need to maintain the disciplined appearance expected of our profession." The Sikhs say in their lawsuit that "it is perverse to claim that respecting 'the individual desires of Marines' to have full-body tattoos is consistent with mission accomplishment, but that respecting Marines' desires to be faithful to God is somehow risky."

Giselle Klapper, a civil rights attorney with an advocacy group, the Sikh Coalition, who is one of the lawyers representing the plaintiffs, said that the coalition tried for more than a year to negotiate a solution with Marine Corps leaders, but that the corps had been unreceptive.

She predicted that her clients would prevail, as Sikhs have in the other service branches, but said she was disappointed that they had to take the issue to court.

“We feel we have run out of other options,” she said. “People’s lives have been put on hold. How long do they have to wait?”

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HEADLINE	04/11 Putin intends to escalate war in Ukraine
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-putin.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/europe/ukraine-russia-war-putin.html</a>
GIST	<p>Austria’s chancellor visited President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Monday — the first Western leader to see him in person since the Ukraine invasion — and said he came away feeling not only pessimistic about peace prospects but fearing that Mr. Putin intended to drastically intensify the brutality of the war.</p> <p>Describing Mr. Putin as dismissive of atrocities in Ukraine, the visiting chancellor, Karl Nehammer, said it was clear that Russian forces were mobilizing for a large-scale assault in eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region, the next phase of a war now in its seventh week.</p> <p>“The battle being threatened cannot be underestimated in its violence,” Mr. Nehammer said in a news conference after the 75-minute meeting at Mr. Putin’s residence outside Moscow that the visitor described as blunt and direct.</p> <p>The Austrian chancellor said he had told the Russian president that as long as people were dying in Ukraine, “the sanctions against Russia will stay in place and will be toughened further.”</p> <p>The Kremlin, playing down the meeting’s significance in a terse statement, said only that it was “not long by the standards of recent times.”</p> <p>Even as Mr. Nehammer was visiting, Russian forces were bombarding Ukrainian cities and towns, and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine said “tens of thousands are dead” in Mariupol, the besieged southern city that has been the scene of the most intense destruction of the war.</p> <p>And Mr. Putin, despite Russia’s military blunders in the war, and for all the Western efforts to ostracize him, still appeared in control of the crisis. He has severely repressed any dissent and benefited from widespread domestic support, continuing revenues from oil and gas sales to Europe, the implicit backing of China and the refusal of much of the world to join sanctions against Russia.</p> <p>Many commentators in the West had criticized the Austrian chancellor — his country is a member of the European Union but not of NATO — for having visited Moscow at all, seemingly playing into Mr. Putin’s narrative that American-led efforts to isolate Russia would necessarily end in failure.</p> <p>Mr. Nehammer told reporters afterward that he had tried to confront Mr. Putin with the horrors of war and of the war crimes that Russian troops are accused of having committed in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha and elsewhere. He said he also had told Mr. Putin about the destroyed Russian tanks he saw on a recent visit to Ukraine, to make clear the enormous loss of life that Russia was suffering.</p> <p>Mr. Nehammer said that Mr. Putin had brushed aside the accusations of war crimes as having been staged by Ukraine.</p> <p>At the end, Mr. Putin told him: “It would be better if it” — the war — “ended soon,” Mr. Nehammer said, but the meaning of those words was unclear, since they could either signal that Mr. Putin was</p>

prepared for further peace talks or that he could be readying a quick and brutal assault in the Donbas, where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting Ukraine's military since 2014.

"We can have no illusions: President Putin has totally adopted the logic of war, and is acting accordingly," Mr. Nehammer said. "This is why I believe it is so important to permanently confront him with the facts of the war."

How much more brutal the war could become was signaled in an interview with Eduard Basurin, a separatist commander, aired on Russian state television. Mr. Basurin said that with Ukrainian forces ensconced in underground fortifications at a steel plant in Mariupol, storming the redoubt did not make sense. Instead, he said, Russian forces needed to first block the exits and then "turn to the chemical troops who will find a way to smoke the moles out of their holes."

Mr. Putin was silent on Monday but was expected to speak publicly on Tuesday, when he will travel to the Vostochny spaceport in Russia's far east with President Aleksandr G. Lukashenko of Belarus, his ally, to mark the annual Cosmonauts' Day.

The Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine has increasingly been framed by Mr. Putin as not against that country, but against the West — specifically, the United States, as the supposed patron of Mr. Zelensky's government and its aspirations to escape Russia's sphere of influence as a former Soviet republic.

Sergey V. Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, said in a Russian television interview that aired on Monday that what the Kremlin calls its "special operation" in Ukraine is aimed at rolling back American influence — which the Russian government characterizes as the root of the world's ills.

"Our special military operation is designed to put an end to the reckless expansion, and the reckless course toward complete dominance, of the United States," Mr. Lavrov said.

The United States and European Union have imposed increasingly severe economic sanctions on Russia over the invasion and are sending weapons to Ukraine's military. But they do not want to get drawn into a war with Russia. And the European Union remains reluctant to ban Russian oil and natural gas, which remain critical to the bloc's own economic health.

E.U. foreign ministers met on Monday in Luxembourg and the bloc's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles, said that "nothing is off the table, including sanctions on oil and gas."

While ministers discussed a possible phaseout of Russian oil, more easily replaceable from other suppliers than gas, the meeting also laid bare the bloc's divisions. Austria, Hungary and Germany opposed any effort, for now, to restrict Russian gas imports.

Still, European Union leaders were expected to approve another 500 million euros in funds to repay member states for sending weapons to Ukraine, which would mean a total of 1.5 billion euros so far — nearly equivalent to the \$1.7 billion in weapons that the United States has authorized.

Russian troops, having retreated from northern Ukraine after a failed effort last month to reach the capital, Kyiv, have been resupplying and regrouping in Russia and Belarus so they can join the battle in eastern Ukraine. But Western officials said on Monday that effort may still take some time.

Ukrainian officials have been warning since last week that civilians in east Ukraine should flee while they can. Mr. Zelensky warned that tens of thousands of Russian troops were preparing a renewed assault there.

If and when the southern port city of Mariupol finally falls, Russian troops can move north to meet up with Russian troops attempting to move south from Izyum and try to encircle the bulk of Ukraine's army, which is concentrated further east, said Mathieu Boulègue, an expert on the Russian military at Chatham House, the London research institution.

That is easier said than done, Mr. Boulègue said, as the battered Russian troops await reinforcements. The Ukrainians, he said, were trying to block the Russians and organize a counterattack that would be more complicated than the fighting around Kyiv, which had forced the Russians to retreat.

Given the reports of Russian atrocities at Bucha, Kramatorsk, Mariupol and other cities, negotiations between the Ukrainian and Russian governments are on hold.

But few believe that the antagonists are ready for real talks, because Mr. Putin needs to show more military gains and because the Ukrainians believe that they can still repel the Russians, said Ivo Daalder, former U.S. ambassador to NATO.

“The Ukrainians think they have an opportunity not just to prevent Russia from gaining more ground in the east but expelling them from there, while Putin needs to find something he can sell as a victory,” Mr. Daalder said. “So diplomacy is not going anywhere.”

If and when talks on a settlement finally occur, Mr. Putin will inevitably be part of them, said François Heisbourg, a French defense expert. Diplomats deal with leaders of governments, no matter how distasteful, he said.

The West also hopes that increasing economic pain will encourage Mr. Putin to scale down the war and end it. Russia is already in “deep recession” and its economy is expected to shrink by 11 percent this year, the World Bank reported.

But the impact is severe on Ukraine, too. The bank forecast that Ukraine’s economy would shrink by about 45 percent this year because of the Russian invasion and the impact of a “deep humanitarian crisis.”

Mr. Putin originally named one goal of the war as the “denazification” of Ukraine, falsely labeling as Nazis those who resist Russian domination. An article on Monday in a Russian state newspaper, *Parlamentskaya Gazeta*, written by an adviser to the chairman of Russia’s lower house of Parliament, expanded on that concept to define the enemy as “Ukrainian-American neo-Nazism.”

The fight also included a “cold war” against enemies of the state inside Russia, the article said, adding: “The denazification of Ukraine is impossible without a parallel denazification of Russia.”

It was the latest sign that, even as the war in Ukraine rages, Mr. Putin is priming his security apparatus for an ever-widening intolerance for dissent. The crackdown has accelerated in recent weeks, with pro-war Russians turning in teachers and neighbors who speak out against the war.

Last Friday, Russia closed some of the last remaining independent institutions of civil society, including the Carnegie Moscow Center and the Moscow offices of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. It expanded the practice of naming government critics as “foreign agents,” for the first time adding a popular musician to the list: the rapper Ivan Dryomin, 25, who goes by the name Face.

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HEADLINE	04/11 New White House Covid czar: be careful
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/politics/covid-cases-white-house-czar.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/politics/covid-cases-white-house-czar.html</a>
GIST	<p>The new White House Covid-19 response coordinator, Dr. Ashish K. Jha, said Monday that while there had been a recent uptick in new U.S. coronavirus cases, he was not overly concerned.</p> <p>“We’ve got to watch this very carefully — obviously, I never like to see infections rising — I think we’ve got to be careful,” Dr. Jha <a href="#">said on the “Today” show</a>. “But I don’t think this is a moment where we have to be excessively concerned.”</p>



[Dr. Jha, a public health expert](#), made several [media appearances](#) on Monday, [his first official day](#) according to the White House, and he pointed to low hospitalization numbers across the United States.

The vast majority of the country has [low community levels of Covid-19](#), according to calculations performed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that are designed to assess the number of new cases in a community and the strain on its hospitals, a point [also made on Sunday by Dr. Anthony S. Fauci](#), President Biden's top pandemic adviser.

"Right now that is showing an uptick, but not showing substantial changes in what we should be doing," [Dr. Jha said on CNN](#), referring to the C.D.C. framework. "And I think the C.D.C. policy is right on this."

And while he touted the role of at-home tests, Dr. Jha acknowledged many of those results may go unreported, underpinning, he said, the importance of hospitalizations as a metric.

[Dr. Jha's tenure begins](#) as a highly transmissible Omicron subvariant, known as BA.2, has [become the dominant version among new U.S. cases](#). As of Sunday, the United States was averaging more than 31,000 cases a day, an increase of 3 percent over the last two weeks, [according to a New York Times database](#), just a fraction of the height of the Omicron winter surge.

Still, [New York City](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#), [are among the places seeing steeper increases than the nation overall](#), though their average numbers of new cases remain far lower than recent peaks, too. Prominent officials in both cities, such as [Speaker Nancy Pelosi](#) and [Mayor Eric Adams of New York](#), have tested positive in recent days, [as have some Broadway stars](#).

On Monday, [the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said](#) that both Mr. Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris had tested negative in the last 24 hours. Ms. Harris had been considered a close contact of [her communications director, who tested positive last week](#), but the vice president was now five days post-exposure, Ms. Psaki said.

A handful of colleges and universities in the country [have reinstated mask mandates](#) as they battle outbreaks on campus. On Monday, the city of Philadelphia announced [it would soon reinstate an indoor mask mandate](#).

And after the Gridiron Club and Foundation's annual dinner in Washington on April 2, [at least 80 attendees tested positive](#), Tom DeFrank, a contributing editor for National Journal and president of the Gridiron Club, said in an email on Monday afternoon. The number of new cases reported each day has been declining, he said, adding that reported symptoms remain mild, with several asymptomatic cases.

"Now that we are nine days after the dinner, the connection between a new positive test and our dinner is certainly arguable, particularly for public officials who have had a full week of public events," Mr. DeFrank said in a statement.

"What it reminds us is the pandemic isn't over," Dr. Jha [said on "Good Morning America."](#) referring to the number of cases after the Gridiron dinner, which included some Cabinet members. "We are still going to see cases of this virus spreading. And we have to continue to be vigilant. We have to continue to be careful."

Neither Mr. Biden nor Ms. Pelosi attended the Gridiron dinner, and [Ms. Pelosi said on Monday that](#) she would be leaving isolation on Tuesday after testing negative on Monday.

Elsewhere in the House, Representative Rashida Tlaib [said on Monday](#) she had tested positive. In Connecticut, the lieutenant governor, Susan Bysiewicz, said she [tested positive, too](#).

	<p>Dr. Jha also told the “Today” show that the C.D.C. would get the final say on <a href="#">the future of the mask mandate on airplanes</a> and other public transportation — but said that extending the requirement, <a href="#">which currently goes through at least April 18</a>, “is absolutely on the table.”</p> <p>Dr. Jha replaced Jeffrey D. Zients, who left the position to return to his private life, according to the White House. Mr. Zients, an entrepreneur and management consultant, <a href="#">steered the White House response</a> and U.S. vaccination campaign through multiple variants.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Biden presses a wary India on Russia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/biden-presses-wary-india-russia-ukraine-crisis-dee/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/biden-presses-wary-india-russia-ukraine-crisis-dee/</a>
GIST	<p>The world’s two biggest democracies are having trouble getting on the same page over the world’s hottest war.</p> <p>In a full-court press, President Biden lobbied Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a video call Monday not to boost New Delhi’s purchases of Russian oil in the face of a U.S.-led push to punish the Kremlin for its 6-week-old invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Separately, U.S. and Indian foreign and defense ministers met behind closed doors in Washington to discuss the crisis — after barely mentioning Ukraine in their public remarks to reporters.</p> <p>The Biden-Modi conversation was just the latest sign that India, which has a history of defense and economic ties with Russia dating back to its very first days of independence, is an outlier among U.S. allies and democratic governments on the Ukraine crisis.</p> <p>Mr. Modi, whose political base at home has a strong pro-Russia and anti-U.S. strain, called the war “very worrying,” but White House officials said he made no commitment to cut back India’s recent purchases of discounted Russian oil.</p> <p>Mr. Modi told Mr. Biden that he hopes talks between Ukraine and Russia will lead to peace and called for an inquiry into atrocities outside of Kyiv. Mr. Biden tried to make the case that offering Russian President Vladimir Putin an economic lifeline was not helping the situation.</p> <p>“The president made clear that he doesn’t believe it’s in India’s interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy or other commodities,” White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters after the call.</p> <p>Mr. Modi said he has spoken on the phone multiple times with Mr. Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since the invasion began in late February.</p> <p>“I not only appealed for peace but also suggested there be direct talks between President Putin and the president of Ukraine ...,” he said in the virtual meeting with Mr. Biden. “Recently, the news about the killing of innocent civilians in the [city of Bucha] was very worrying.</p> <p>We instantly condemned the killing and have called for an independent inquiry. We hope that the ongoing discussions between Russia and Ukraine will lead to peace.”</p> <p>India’s stance on Ukraine poses a dilemma for Mr. Biden because Washington has been assiduously cultivating New Delhi as part of an alliance of East Asian democracies to contain China. India is perhaps the key player in the Indo-Pacific security “Quad” with the U.S., Japan and Australia. Mr. Modi and Mr. Biden are set to meet in person at a summit of Quad leaders next month in Tokyo.</p> <p>India’s formally neutral stance on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has frustrated global partners and boosted the Kremlin’s case that much of the world does not share the U.S. and NATO view of the clash in Eastern Europe. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, on a recent visit to New Delhi, praised India for judging “the situation in its entirety, not just in a one-sided way.”</p>

India abstained from a recent U.S.-sponsored measure to suspend Russia from the 47-member Human Rights Council. It also continues to buy Russian oil at a discounted price despite a global push to cut off Moscow from such proceeds, though some European countries also have maintained purchases.

A senior U.S. administration official described the call between Mr. Biden and Mr. Modi as “warm and productive” but “very candid.”

The official was careful not to condemn India’s purchases of Russian oil, noting they make up a tiny percentage of India’s energy imports and not every country is in an ideal position to cut off supply from Russia. The official acknowledged that it was a topic of discussion.

“Other countries have to make their own choices,” the official said.

The official said Mr. Biden talked about how India could diversity its energy supply and noted that India should take into account that its Asian rival China has also resisted Western sanctions on the Russian economy and has moved closer to Mr. Putin as the Ukraine invasion has unfolded.

Accentuating the positive

In public, Mr. Biden struck a positive tone during the public portion of the meeting by saying the countries have a deep connection and welcomed India’s humanitarian support for Ukraine.

“The United States and India are going to continue our close consultation on how to manage the destabilizing effects of this Russian war,” Mr. Biden said.

Mr. Modi, likewise, hailed the U.S. and India as the largest and oldest democracies.

“We are natural partners and the progress that has taken place in our relations, the new momentum that has been created, would have been hard to even imagine a few decades ago,” Mr. Modi said.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with their Indian counterparts in the fourth annual “2+2” series of discussions on a range of issues. As with the Biden-Modi conversation, the public remarks largely danced around the divisions over Russia and Ukraine.

In welcoming Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh at the Pentagon, Mr. Austin suggested that both China and Russia are looking to undermine the security of their neighbors and to alter the status quo by force.

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the humanitarian devastation that it has created are blatant attempts to undermine the international order that is grounded in the rules and the principles that we share,” Mr. Austin said. “Now more than ever, democracies must stand together to defend the values that we all share.”

Mr. Singh brought a more generic public message without mentioning Ukraine. He told reporters at the Pentagon that he hoped the meetings would take the U.S.-India strategic partnership to the next level.

“This meeting and our 2+2 dialogue are indeed important landmarks in our bilateral relationship,” he said. “I hope this engagement will prove to be beneficial to strengthen our bilateral relationship.”

The Times of India, in its coverage of the summit, said Monday’s call represented “a diplomatic version of irresistible force meeting immovable object,” with Mr. Biden failing to persuade Mr. Modi to follow the “U.S.-NATO line on Russia.”

	<p>China's nationalistic press has picked up on the tensions between the U.S. and India over Ukraine. The state-controlled Global Times wrote gleefully in an editorial that Monday's talks with Indian leaders put Washington in "an awkward position."</p> <p>"Everyone can see that no matter how much the U.S. emphasizes its strategic partnership with India, no matter how euphemistic it sounds, it cannot cover up the big divergence between the two countries on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, nor will it change the fact that U.S. pressure on India to condemn Russia is the theme of their meeting," the editorial said.</p> <p>Still, some analysts say that while India would prefer not to pick sides in the diplomatic tug of war, the Modi government will face mounting pressure to break with Russia should the Ukraine conflict drag on.</p> <p>"India will likely only collaborate with Russia for as long as this does not invite the prospect of U.S. sanctions," Sergey Sukhankin, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation and an adviser at Gulf State Analytics, said in an analysis for the Eurasia Daily Monitor.</p> <p>"If New Delhi is forced to choose sides, it is highly unlikely that it will openly side in Moscow's favor. Not only are Russian-Indian economic ties — \$8.1 billion in trade turnover during April 2020-March 2021 — negligible compared to bilateral trade relations with the US — \$146 billion in 2019 — ... but also New Delhi sees that Moscow prioritizes its relations with Beijing."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Ukraine braces for Donbas battle</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/ukraine-braces-donbas-battle-moscows-war-effort-fa/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/ukraine-braces-donbas-battle-moscows-war-effort-fa/</a>
GIST	<p>Ukraine braced itself Monday for a massive Russian assault on the country's eastern Donbas region, which is set to become ground zero in a bloody conflict that shows no sign of stopping despite growing questions about whether Moscow can secure anything resembling the original victory it sought.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy again appealed for outside support as Russian forces were regrouping and repositioning ahead of the Donbas campaign, which Pentagon officials said is likely to begin soon. U.S. defense officials said a large Russian convoy of troops, vehicles and equipment was headed toward the region, and Ukrainian officials urged civilians to flee the area or risk being caught in the crossfire.</p> <p>Russia's decision to pull its troops from northern Ukraine and abandon its effort to capture the capital of Kyiv has raised fears across Ukraine and Western nations that Moscow will double down on its strategy of targeting civilians and nonmilitary targets in the more vulnerable east and south. Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer gave voice to those fears Monday after what he described as a "very direct, open and tough" meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>Mr. Nehammer, the first leader of a European Union nation to visit Mr. Putin since the war began Feb. 24, said he confronted the Russian leader about suspected war crimes in the city of Bucha and elsewhere across Ukraine. He effectively warned the Kremlin against such tactics in the coming Donbas battle. Mr. Putin has resolutely denied Russian guilt in the face of widespread condemnation.</p> <p>"All those who are responsible will be held to account," the chancellor said of Russia's brutal, indiscriminate tactics in the six weeks of fighting.</p> <p>The southern port city of Mariupol also has been the site of carnage and devastation. The city's mayor, Vadym Boychenko, told The Associated Press on Monday that corpses have been "carpeted through the streets of our city." He estimated the death toll at about 10,000, though he said it could be much higher.</p> <p>Russian shelling was blamed for civilian deaths Monday in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, and in Donetsk, though aides to Mr. Zelenskyy said in Kyiv that Russian forces apparently were allowing some 150,000 residents of Mariupol to leave the beleaguered city.</p>

Mariupol is key to Russia's ambitions in Ukraine. Securing the city could allow Russia to link the Crimean Peninsula, which it forcibly annexed in 2014, with the breakaway pro-Moscow Donbas enclaves in Donetsk and Luhansk. Mr. Putin has formally recognized those two territories as independent "republics," though Ukraine and most of the rest of the world have not acknowledged those claims.

The Donbas region was the site of a grinding civil war between separatists and the Kyiv government for eight years before Russia's invasion in February.

### **Bleak picture**

Set to become the stage of perhaps the most intense fighting of the invasion so far, officials in Luhansk and Donetsk painted a bleak picture for civilians.

"Those that wanted to leave have already left, while now many are left in bomb shelters who are perhaps frightened to come out of the shelters, or scared to lose their possessions," Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Gaidai said Monday, according to Reuters.

Kyiv was returning to a semblance of normalcy as Russian forces were driven away.

Mr. Zelenskyy framed the looming Donbas battle as a fight for his country's very existence.

"Russia is aiming to eliminate Ukraine's independence and separate the country. It is trying to eliminate the culture and language of the Ukrainian nation," he said.

Mr. Zelenskyy's calls for more help have resonated in Washington, where a growing chorus of lawmakers say the Biden administration should send more guns, anti-tank weapons, drones and other weapons of war in the hopes of dealing Mr. Putin a sound defeat.

Russian forces already are reeling from their failed attempt to take Kyiv. They suffered thousands of casualties and lost hundreds of tanks in a series of military missteps.

British intelligence officials said over the weekend that the Kremlin has resorted to calling back discharged soldiers to backfill its growing manpower shortage. Mr. Putin on Sunday shook up his military leadership and installed Gen. Aleksandr V. Dvornikov — known for his brutal tactics during Russia's campaign in Syria — to oversee the Donbas attack.

Even with the full weight of Moscow's war machine pointed at the Donbas, Ukraine may benefit from Russia's change in strategy. Ukraine can redirect some of its forces and equipment away from the northern regions toward the east, effectively reducing the conflict to a single-front war.

Military analysts say Ukrainian soldiers have proved their ability to slow down the much larger Russian force.

"The Ukrainians have been for eight years — and still are — fighting over [the Donbas]," Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters. "And they show no signs of being willing to give that territory up."

Private security analysts say guerrilla warfare tactics and insurgent assaults on Russian troops could effectively doom Mr. Putin's effort to secure a significant foothold in the Donbas beyond what pro-Russian forces controlled before the war.

"Putin's prospects for any sort of victory appear increasingly pyrrhic," former U.S. Army cavalry scout Scott Sweetow wrote in a recent piece for WarOnTheRocks.com.

	<p>“Whether or not history assesses the Russian adventure as a loss, Russia is going to pay a terrible cost in dead soldiers and billions of dollars in destroyed equipment — a toll that is rising daily. Each insurgency has the potential advantage of copying techniques from those that preceded it,” he wrote.</p> <p>The growing toll of war on Mr. Putin’s army seemingly could offer Ukraine a much stronger hand in cease-fire negotiations. Top Biden administration officials said over the weekend that such leverage is the central U.S. goal.</p> <p>“We will continue to take every step we possibly can to help the Ukrainians succeed on the battlefield and to improve their position at the negotiating table,” White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told CNN’s “State of the Union” program on Sunday.</p> <p>Russian officials said Monday that they remain open to peace talks, though the Kremlin has given indications it has no intention of ceasing its attacks, even during negotiations.</p> <p>“I see no reasons for not continuing [offensive operations,] although the Ukrainian side tends to be evasive, sometimes doing U-turns and rejecting what it proposed a couple of days before. But we are persistent and patient,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, according to Russia’s state-run Tass news agency.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 US orders consular staff leave Shanghai</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/us-orders-consular-to-leave-shanghai-amid-covid-ou/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/us-orders-consular-to-leave-shanghai-amid-covid-ou/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>BEIJING — The U.S. has ordered its consular staff to leave Shanghai, which is under a lockdown to contain a COVID-19 surge.</p> <p>The State Department said the order is an upgrade from the “authorized” departure issued last week that made the decision voluntary.</p> <p>The order covers “non-emergency U.S. government employees and their family members from U.S. Consulate General Shanghai.”</p> <p>In its late Monday announcement, the department said, “Our change in posture reflects our assessment that it is best for our employees and their families to be reduced in number and our operations to be scaled down as we deal with the changing circumstances on the ground.”</p> <p>China responded angrily to the earlier voluntary departure order.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 UN: 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of Ukraine’s children fled homes</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/un-nearly-two-thirds-of-ukraines-children-have-fle/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/un-nearly-two-thirds-of-ukraines-children-have-fle/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>UNITED NATIONS — Nearly two-thirds of all Ukrainian children have fled their homes in the six weeks since Russia’s invasion, and the United Nations has verified the deaths of 142 youngsters, though the number is almost certainly much higher, the U.N. children’s agency said Monday.</p> <p>Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF’s emergency programs director who just returned from Ukraine, said having 4.8 million of Ukraine’s 7.5 million children displaced in such a short time is “quite incredible.” He said it is something he hadn’t before seen happen so quickly in 31 years of humanitarian work.</p> <p>“They have been forced to leave everything behind - their homes, their schools and, often, their family members,” he told the U.N. Security Council. “I have heard stories of the desperate steps parents are taking to get their children to safety, and children saddened that they are unable to get back to school.”</p> <p>Ukraine’s U.N. ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, claimed Russia has taken more than 121,000 children out of Ukraine and reportedly drafted a bill to simplify and accelerate adoption procedures for orphans and</p>



even those who have parents and other relatives. He said most of the children were removed from the besieged southern port city of Mariupol and taken to eastern Donetsk and then to the Russian city of Taganrog.

Fontaine said UNICEF has heard the same reports, but added that “we don’t have yet the access that we need to have to be able to look and verify and see if we can assist.”

He said that of Ukraine’s displaced children, 2.8 million are in Ukraine and 2 million more are in other countries. At the same time, he said, nearly half the estimated 3.2 million children still in their homes in Ukraine “may be at risk of not having enough food,” with those in besieged cities like Mariupol facing the most dire situation.

Fontaine said school closings are affecting the education of 5.7 million younger children and 1.5 million students in higher education.

“Hundreds of schools and educational facilities have been attacked or used for military purposes,” he said. “Others are serving as shelters for civilians.”

The council also heard from Sima Bahous, the executive director of the UN Women agency, who recently returned from Moldova, which is hosting an estimated 95,000 Ukrainian refugees.

Bahous said her agency is increasingly hearing allegations of rape and sexual violence. She said Moldova’s government and border police are also very concerned at the risk of human trafficking, especially of young women and unaccompanied teenagers.

“The combination of mass displacement with the large presence of conscripts and mercenaries, and the brutality displayed against Ukrainian civilians, has raised all red flags,” she said.

Ukraine’s ambassador said his country’s prosecutor’s office is now investigating a case in the Kyiv region in which a Russia soldier is alleged to have killed a local resident and then repeatedly raped his wife in their home. He said the alleged perpetrator has been identified.

Kyslytsya said the Prosecutor General’s Office, in cooperation with investigation agencies and health facilities, is also installing “a special mechanism” to document cases of sexual violence by Russian soldiers.

The Security Council meeting on the impact of the war on women and children was convened by the U.S. and Albania during Britain’s presidency of the body.

The three countries, Ukraine and other council members attacked Russia for creating the dire situation for women and children, which Russian deputy ambassador Dmitry Polyansky vehemently denied.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that when men like Russian President Vladimir Putin “start wars, women and children get displaced,” hurt, raped and abused, and they die.

“Since the start of Russia’s unprovoked war against Ukraine, Russia has bombed orphanages and maternity hospitals,” she said. “We’ve seen mass graves with dead children stacked on top of each other.”

Albanian Ambassador Ferit Hoxha accused Russia of committing “unspeakable crimes” every day, including burning civilians, throwing bodies in mass graves, shooting into playgrounds, attacking schools on purpose, and leaving all Ukrainians suffering, especially women and children.

“In their normal life, children draw parents, houses and trees. Russia’s war has made Ukraine kids draw bombs, tanks and weapons,” Hoxha said.

	<p>Both the U.S. and Albanian ambassadors, and many others, pointed to the discovery of bodies, some with hands tied behind their backs, in the town of Bucha on the outskirts of Kyiv following the withdrawal of Russian troops, and the missile that killed at least 52 mainly women and children at the train station in eastern Kramatorsk. Hoxha noted that the missile had “a vicious signature, ‘for our children.’”</p> <p>Russia’s Polyansky blamed “Ukrainian Nazis” for civilian killings in Bucha and the bombing at the Kramatorsk station, which he called “a classic false flag operation.”</p> <p>He accused Ukraine and its public relations experts, along with the West, of promoting “fakes and propaganda” as part of “the information war unleashed against Russia.”</p> <p>“That war is as intense as the military operations on the ground,” he said.</p> <p>Lord Tariq Ahmad, Britain’s minister of state for the U.N. who presided over the meeting, countered that Russia again was trying to deflect from the reality on the ground “by what can only be described as quite extraordinary statements, and even lies.”</p> <p>“Yet, what is true, what is fact, is that Russian attacks on civilians and residential areas have been truly barbaric,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Pentagon: India crucial US plans Asia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/neutral-russia-india-still-crucial-us-plans-asia-p/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/11/neutral-russia-india-still-crucial-us-plans-asia-p/</a>
GIST	<p>India remains a vital partner to the U.S. in helping to counter China’s increasingly aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific region, even though New Delhi has declined to take a strong stand in the Ukrainian crisis against Russia, New Delhi’s close ally since the earliest days of independence.</p> <p>On Monday, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with their Indian counterparts in the fourth annual “2+2” series of discussions on a range of issues. The meeting comes as the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has declined to join a Western sanctions campaign against Moscow over the Ukraine invasion and large numbers of Mr. Modi’s political base express sympathy for Moscow and skepticism of Washington.</p> <p>Despite its neutral stance, India is seen as a key pillar of U.S. hopes in Asia to contain an aggressive China, which is what U.S. officials preferred to emphasize publicly on Monday.</p> <p>“Our partnership is based on a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region, one grounded in principles such as the rule of law and national sovereignty,” Mr. Austin said, shortly after Indian Minister of Defense Rajnath Singh arrived at the Pentagon for early talks.</p> <p>Mr. Austin suggested that both China and Russia are both looking to undermine the security of its neighbors and to alter the status quo by force.</p> <p>“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the humanitarian devastation that it has created are blatant attempts to undermine the international order that is grounded in the rules and the principles that we share,” Mr. Austin said. “Now more than ever, democracies must stand together to defend the values that we all share.”</p> <p>Defense Minister Singh brought a more generic message in public, telling reporters at the Pentagon he hoped the meetings would take the U.S.-India strategic partnership to the next level.</p> <p>“This meeting and our 2+2 dialogue are indeed important landmarks in our bilateral relationship,” he said. “I hope this engagement will prove to be beneficial to strengthen our bilateral relationship.”</p>

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>The country's stance on President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine has caused concern in Washington. India abstained on a U.S. motion last week to suspend Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council. The country also continues to purchase energy from Russia, despite pressure from Western countries.</p> <p>A senior U.S. official last month called India's U.N. votes "unsatisfactory" but "totally unsurprising," and even Mr. Biden told a business forum in March that India had been "somewhat shaky" in the allied campaign to punish Mr. Putin for the war.</p> <p>But even the Modi government's decision to acquire the Russian-made S-400 air defense system has not soured the Pentagon on a deepening partnership with India.</p> <p>"Every nation has to make their own sovereign decisions about what they're going to do and what they're not going to do about Russia's invasion of Ukraine," a senior Defense Department official said Monday. "We value that partnership [with India] and we want to improve it going forward."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Survey: Nisqually River I-5 bridge warning</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/nisqually-river-bridge-tribe-funding-federal-governor-inslee/281-06093b3e-6289-4dca-83f7-12630bb285df">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/nisqually-river-bridge-tribe-funding-federal-governor-inslee/281-06093b3e-6289-4dca-83f7-12630bb285df</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>NISQUALLY INDIAN COMMUNITY, Wash. — Growing up on the Nisqually River, Willie Frank, III, has seen the river change, and not for the better.</p> <p>"The bank is rotting away, the sandbars in the middle of the river, those never used to be there," said Frank, III, chair of the <a href="#">Nisqually Tribal Council</a>.</p> <p>Instead of building Interstate 5 on piers above the river, the state used landfill for some of the foundation, permanently changing the route of the river.</p> <p>Decades later, the changes could lead to catastrophic problems, economically and for commuters in the state. A U.S. Geological Survey predicts the bridge over the river could be wiped out by floods within 20 years, cutting off a vital portion of I-5.</p> <p>Monday morning Frank, III, led a boat tour of the Nisqually River with U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, U.S. Representative Marilyn Strickland, and Gov. Jay Inslee.</p> <p>"It's necessary we do this now," said Inslee. "This river is fast and it's moving sand by the ton fast ... and we have some long-term risk, so I'm glad we're moving on this."</p> <p>State lawmakers have authorized nearly \$80 million to look at replacing or repairing the stretch of highway, but those projects could cost more than \$4 billion.</p> <p>Sen. Cantwell said federal infrastructure funding could cover some of the costs.</p> <p>"We're hoping to get a game plan of how the state and federal partners can work together to try to look at those numbers and see how they might be used for this project," said Cantwell.</p> <p>Rep. Strickland said the federal government and the state need to take action.</p> <p>"We typically are responding to crises," said Strickland. "We have to get ahead of this."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Space Needle celebrates 60yrs unique way</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/space-needle-celebrates-60-years-with-unique-contest/54SDBSRW4FEUFCHLHCRG3CCHZ4/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/space-needle-celebrates-60-years-with-unique-contest/54SDBSRW4FEUFCHLHCRG3CCHZ4/</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be on the roof of the Space Needle?</p> <p>For its 60th anniversary, the Seattle Space Needle is painting the sloped roof Galaxy Gold, the tower's original color, and five grand prize winners will have the opportunity to help paint the roof.</p> <p>The “Celebrating 60 Contest” is currently accepting submissions at <a href="https://spaceneedle.com/60">spaceneedle.com/60</a> for people to share their Space Needle memories from the past 60 years.</p> <p>Five people will be selected to join the painting of the roof on April 21.</p> <p>55 additional winners will also receive Space Needle tickets, VIP packages to The Loupe Lounger, admission to Chihuly Garden and Glass, and passes to the Seattle International Film Festival. Submissions must be received by Sunday, April 17.</p> <p>Built for the 1962 World's Fair, the Space Needle underwent a \$100 million renovation in September 2017, installing the world's first and only rotating glass floor.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Concrete strike over? Drivers not at work</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/despote-truce-concrete-strike-drivers-arent-called-back-work/UURQCVNQUIRE2PE6IB7CHPIQY6E/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/despote-truce-concrete-strike-drivers-arent-called-back-work/UURQCVNQUIRE2PE6IB7CHPIQY6E/</a>
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE, Wash. — After negotiating for months, Puget Sound concrete workers are taking a break from the picket line. No deal has been made, but they have temporarily stopped protesting. For many, Monday was their first day back on the job, but Teamsters organizers say the return to work has been slow going.</p> <p>According to Local 174, three of the six local concrete companies (Cadman, Stoneway and Merlino Construction) have not called any of the more than 300 workers back.</p> <p>“Offering to return to work without a fair contract was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made, but we made the decision as a union because this is bigger than ourselves, and we didn’t want to see our community hurt anymore,” said mixer driver Brett Gallagher. “It’s a slap in the face to everyone in Seattle that these concrete companies are so used to dragging their feet that they can’t even call us back to work.”</p> <p>KIRO 7 has reached out to the concrete companies for a response but has yet to hear back from them.</p> <p>While tensions continue to rise, the news of a temporary truce is celebrated by trade workers. Local builders estimate that, in March, as many as 15,000 lost their jobs due to the strike.</p> <p>“Laborers, carpenters, everyone felt that,” said laborer John Hall. “Even the places that stayed open had to trim down.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Gov. emergency powers remain in place</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/politics/emergency-powers-for-gov-inslee-remain-in-place-although-covid-crisis-has-eased">https://komonews.com/news/politics/emergency-powers-for-gov-inslee-remain-in-place-although-covid-crisis-has-eased</a>
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — Now that Oregon's governor has rescinded the emergency powers declaration that she issued at the onset of the COVID crisis, some are wondering will Washington state be next?</p> <p>Gov. Jay Inslee's <a href="#">emergency declaration</a> remains in place some two years after the state logged its first reported coronavirus case.</p>

Even though there is a slight uptick in cases in some areas of the state, it is nothing like what we saw with the last surge.

Inslee has said in the past that his emergency declaration is important remain in place in order to keep the state eligible for federal relief dollars.

“As we’ve said now for two years we’ll continue to make decisions that keep people safe,” he said during a press event Monday. “We’re doing that and we want to make sure that federal money keeps coming. So, it’s important to keep this in place right now.”

But the governor has closely aligned Washington with what has been happening in Oregon.

Gov. Kate Brown has rescinded her emergency declaration as of April 1, saying, “As we learn to live with this virus, and with so many Oregonians protected by safe and effective vaccines, we can now protect ourselves, our friends, and our families without invoking the extraordinary emergency authorities that were necessary at the beginning of the pandemic.”

Republican state Rep. Jim Walsh said Inslee should follow Brown’s lead and urges people to tell Inslee that.

“Tell him ‘Too much, governor. Too long’” Walsh said. “The time is now to give up the emergency powers that you claimed more than two years ago.”

But even though the governor has retained emergency powers, there is no talk of returning to mask mandates.

Rather he has said in the past that he wants to rely on people getting tested if they need to and to get vaccinated.

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HEADLINE	04/11 Health officials urge vigilance; not done
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/local-health-officials-urge-to-remain-vigilant-because-covid-19-pandemic-is-not-done">https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/local-health-officials-urge-to-remain-vigilant-because-covid-19-pandemic-is-not-done</a>
GIST	<p>Although we're seeing fewer masks out and about and fewer lines to get vaccinated, the COVID-19 pandemic is not done according to local health officials.</p> <p>"We certainly want everyone to remain vigilant," said Dr. Chris Spitters with the Snohomish Health District.</p> <p>In fact, according to the CDC, while the majority of the U.S. and Washington are seeing low community levels of the virus, the spots seeing a medium level here are two of the three largest counties in the state.</p> <p>"Case numbers have gone up a bit but we're not seeing a corresponding increase in hospitalizations," Spitters said.</p> <p>According to Spitters, right now in his county, they're only seeing a small bump in cases going up because of the omicron subvariant.</p> <p>He does not think we're seeing a surge though but he said it's important to pay attention to what the virus is doing.</p> <p>"While BA.2 seems to be making a run it doesn't seem to be having a big impact now," Spitters said.</p> <p>It's the same sentiment from Dr. Ali Mokdad with UW's Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, who says any type of surge from the subvariant won't be like what we saw initially with omicron or with delta.</p>

"We'll have a bump for a week or two and it will start coming down fast," Mokdad said.

While other parts of the U.S. are reinstating mask mandates or worrying about an imminent surge, health experts we spoke with say our vaccination rates and the number of people who've already been infected with COVID-19 make them feel like we'll stay in a relatively good place for the time being.

"We're in some sort of surge," said Dr. John Lynch with Harborview Medical Center. "Is it a small surge? Is it a medium surge? Is it large? I don't know."

Lynch and the other health experts we talked to feel like we have enough tools and prior experience to help us limit any massive infection, but Lynch says fatigue and political divisions can make plans difficult.

"We'll see what happens in the next couple of days and where we go in Western Washington," Lynch said.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Ukraine prepares for 'new stage of terror'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/chemical-weapons-mariupol.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/chemical-weapons-mariupol.html</a>
GIST	<p>President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in his latest address seized on an apparent Russian threat to use chemical weapons against the remaining defenders of Mariupol, as they prepare for what he called a "new stage of terror against Ukraine."</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky's comments came after Eduard Basurin, a spokesman for the Kremlin-backed, separatist <a href="#">Donetsk People's Republic</a>, said on Russian television that Russia should bring in "chemical forces" to use in Mariupol, the besieged southern city. He said the remaining Ukrainian forces in Mariupol were dug in at a steel plant and that Russia should encircle it and "smoke out the moles."</p> <p>Referring to those remarks, Mr. Zelensky said in <a href="#">his latest video address</a>, "We take this as seriously as possible." The video was posted online Monday in the United States, and shortly after midnight on Tuesday in Ukraine.</p> <p>Earlier in the day, a Ukrainian unit in Mariupol claimed on social media that Russian invaders had used chemical weapons there. Lesia Vasylenko, a member of Ukraine's Parliament, <a href="#">made a similar charge</a>. But those reports could not be independently confirmed.</p> <p>"We are aware of social media reports which claim Russian forces deployed a potential chemical munition in Mariupol, Ukraine," John F. Kirby, the Pentagon spokesman, said. "We cannot confirm at this time and will continue to monitor the situation closely. These reports, if true, are deeply concerning and reflective of concerns that we have had about Russia's potential to use a variety of riot control agents, including tear gas mixed with chemical agents, in Ukraine."</p> <p>The British Defense Ministry said on Monday that prior use of phosphorous munitions by Russian forces in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine "raises in the possibility of their future employment in Mariupol as fighting for the city intensifies."</p> <p>The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday night.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Ukrainian Parliament</a> said on Monday that it had learned of local reports from the police that Russian forces had fired on nitric acid tanks in the Donetsk region.</p> <p>In his address, Mr. Zelensky called on Ukrainian allies to help supply "necessary weapons."</p> <p>"Unfortunately, we are not getting as much as we need to end this war sooner," Mr. Zelensky said in a <a href="#">translation of his address</a> shared by his office. "I am sure that we will get almost everything we need,</p>



	but not only time is being lost. The lives of Ukrainians are being lost — lives that can no longer be returned.”
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Some universities reinstate masks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/11/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#colleges-mask-mandate">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/11/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#colleges-mask-mandate</a>
GIST	<p>A small number of U.S. colleges and universities are reinstating mask policies, citing coronavirus outbreaks on campus. Their regulation changes come as a highly transmissible Omicron subvariant, <a href="#">known as BA.2</a>, has become the dominant version among new U.S. cases, which are ticking up.</p> <p>As of Sunday, there were an average of more than 31,000 new cases across the country, <a href="#">according to a New York Times database</a>, a 3 percent increase over the last two weeks. New York City and Washington, D.C., <a href="#">have seen sharper increases</a>, though the average number of cases remains a fraction of each city’s peak. <a href="#">Several prominent officials</a> and <a href="#">some Broadway stars</a> have recently tested positive.</p> <p>Amid the winter surge driven by another form of Omicron, some universities shifted to <a href="#">enacting school policies</a> aimed at living with the virus, such as quarantining and social distancing when outbreaks occur, rather than canceling instruction altogether. As new cases decreased, some colleges and universities <a href="#">further loosened precautions</a>, such as widespread surveillance testing programs, despite criticism from public health experts.</p> <p>But now, while some universities, such as Harvard, <a href="#">are letting professors decide</a> what protocol to follow in the classroom, others are imposing new mask rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>American University</b> <a href="#">announced on Monday</a> that it would start requiring masks in all campus buildings, including medical facilities and the school’s shuttles, beginning on Tuesday. Professors will be able to remove their masks in classrooms while teaching.</li> <li>• <b>Columbia University</b> <a href="#">said on Sunday</a> that students would have to wear non-cloth masks in classrooms for the remainder of the spring semester, through May 2, “based on the current situation and in an abundance of caution.”</li> <li>• <b>Georgetown University</b> <a href="#">announced last week</a> that masks would be required inside any campus buildings until further notice because of campus Covid outbreaks, “particularly among undergraduate students.”</li> <li>• <b>Johns Hopkins University</b> <a href="#">said last week</a> that it would require masks indoors, along with twice-weekly testing of students, citing that nearly 100 of its more than 5,000 undergraduate students had tested positive since April 1.</li> <li>• <b>Rice University</b> reinstated <a href="#">its mask policy</a> for classrooms, regardless of vaccination status. Those who are unvaccinated also must continue to wear a mask in other indoor areas.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 China health official: lockdown best way</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/11/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#shanghai-lockdown-zero-covid">https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/04/11/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?type=stylIn-live-updates&amp;label=coronavirus%20updates&amp;index=0#shanghai-lockdown-zero-covid</a>
GIST	<p>To Shanghai residents who have reached the <a href="#">limit of their patience</a> with a lockdown that has kept them stuck at home for two weeks, a top health official has a message: “We cannot let our guard down.”</p> <p>Despite reports that the shutdown of daily life in Shanghai has caused food shortages and reduced access to medical care, Liang Wannian, a senior official at China’s National Health Commission, said on Sunday that the lockdown was the best way to ensure “people first, lives first.”</p> <p>Under the country’s zero-Covid strategy, Shanghai and more than a dozen other cities in China are under full or partial lockdowns to tackle spikes in Omicron cases of the coronavirus. The lockdowns are exposing a growing <a href="#">social</a> and <a href="#">economic cost</a> of the strategy, which has been abandoned nearly everywhere else in the world.</p>

Other countries have lifted most restrictions, but “lying flat is not an option for China,” Mr. Liang said, referring to the phenomenon of “lying flat,” or relaxing, in the face of a challenge.

China’s relatively low vaccination rate among older people and its limited health care resources for treating severe virus cases continue to worry officials and keep them from easing pandemic restrictions. There are around 264 million people over the age of 60 in China, and some 40 million of them have not been vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Infections among this group were inevitable, Mr. Liang said, but “we have to take it seriously.” He spoke in an interview with Chinese state media.

Health authorities reported 27,419 new locally transmitted cases in China on Monday, most of them in Shanghai, a city of 26 million. That case count is small compared with many countries, but the recent surge, fueled by the Omicron variant, is the biggest that China has experienced so far.

China has reported more than 200,000 locally transmitted coronavirus cases in Shanghai since the current outbreak began last month, most of them mild or asymptomatic. The city has just one case that is currently categorized as “severe”; officials said the case required hospital treatment but did not elaborate. No deaths have been reported in the current outbreak.

Mass testing, a key part of China’s strategy to eliminate infections, has allowed health authorities to isolate patients who test positive and send them quickly to a hospital or isolation facility. The southern Chinese city of Guangzhou said last week that it would test all 18 million of its residents, after a small number of locally transmitted cases — fewer than 30 — were reported over the previous seven days. Officials in Shanghai announced a second round of mass testing for that city’s 25 million residents over the weekend.

In the city of Wuhan, where the coronavirus first emerged, officials began on Monday to require residents wishing to use the city’s subway to have had a negative result on a nucleic acid test within the past 48 hours. Passengers must show their test result and scan a code from the specific subway car they sit in, so that authorities can keep track of exposure, according to a notice posted online by the Wuhan Metro on Monday.

Though Mr. Liang indicated that China would not back down from its coronavirus strategy, authorities in Shanghai appeared to respond to a public outcry over the city’s handling of the outbreak. The vice mayor said on Saturday that the city would begin to lift lockdown measures in neighborhoods that go 14 days without a new case. On Monday, the city announced a system to categorize districts based on the number of reported positive cases in each.

However, those moves will not do much to mitigate the lockdown’s larger economic impact, some economists said.

“The extent of the lockdown is far more serious than people realize,” said Bo Zhuang, a China analyst at the investment firm Loomis Sayles.

For most of last year, only a few cities in China were under lockdown at any one time, and the economic damage was manageable, Mr. Zhuang said. But these days, he estimated, the equivalent of around a quarter of China’s economic output is on hold.

“Now we are talking about a couple of provinces under lockdown because of Omicron,” Mr. Zhuang said. “This would be a risk going forward.”

The growing frustration over having daily life disrupted is another risk.

When millions of people in Wuhan learned on Monday morning about the new rules imposed overnight concerning the city’s subway system, many turned to social media to complain.

“Since Wuhan lifted the lockdown two years ago, it has issued the most stringent prevention and control measures,” Zhai Haichao, a writer and a businessman, wrote on the popular Chinese social media platform Weibo. “It’s disturbing that we see no end of the pandemic.”

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Lawsuit: PCSD discrimination, retaliation</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article260253750.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article260253750.html</a>
GIST	<p>A detective sergeant is suing the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department for alleged discrimination and retaliation against women.</p> <p>Det. Sgt. Jessica Whitehead, a 15-year veteran, claims she was punished for asking to avoid child violence investigations after the death of her stepdaughter, a complaint made to Human Resources was mishandled and she was treated differently than male employees. She also alleges the department’s second-in-command called her and other female employees “bitches.”</p> <p>A lawsuit was filed March 31 in Superior Court against the Sheriff’s Department, the county Human Resources Department, Undersheriff Brent Bomkamp, Chief Kevin Roberts and Lt. James Loeffelholz.</p> <p>No specific damages are outlined in the lawsuit.</p> <p>“After Whitehead and another female officer found a solution to Whitehead’s mental health needs, Bomkamp complained that she and women like her were bitches, and Defendants began retaliating against her and sabotaging her training,” the lawsuit states.</p> <p>Adam Faber, spokesperson for the Pierce County Prosecutor’s Office, which represents the Sheriff’s Department in legal matters, said he cannot comment on pending litigation.</p> <p>Whitehead is one of 163 women in a department of 667 employees, according to county statistics. She was promoted to Detective Sergeant in 2019. Months before, her stepdaughter died, and the death had a traumatic effect on her. Then, Chief Roberts, a lieutenant at the time, told her she was going to be assigned to the Special Assault Unit, which involves investigating cases where children are victims of violent and sexual crimes.</p> <p>Ultimately, Whitehead was not assigned to the unit, but that decision didn’t come until the counselor she had begun seeing said Whitehead would be placed on PTSD leave if the department transferred her.</p> <p>In April 2019, a male officer allegedly overheard Undersheriff Bomkamp make a sexist comment to another man in department leadership.</p> <p>“What’s up with females in this department?” Bomkamp said. “Once they get promoted, they become total bitches.”</p> <p>Whitehead filed an equal employment opportunity complaint with HR in January 2020 to report sexism she’d observed. An interview with an HR investigator was scheduled for July. Between the filing of the complaint and the interview, Whitehead said she witnessed a male chief berating women over childcare issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the lawsuit, Whitehead did not see male staff with children treated this way.</p> <p>Whitehead’s complaint also alleged an improper investigation into Bomkamp’s comments.</p> <p>About a month before the complaint was filed, Roberts allegedly asked two women detectives whether they intended to apply for an upcoming promotion. One replied, “you’re all sexist, so no.”</p>

	<p>According to the lawsuit, Roberts asked them if they were referring to Bomkamp's comments. The lawsuit claims the department did not abide by its own policy when investigating the Undersheriff's comments. Instead, it says, a Lieutenant not named as a defendant began questioning female detectives, stating that the Undersheriff was "pissed" that someone reported it.</p> <p>Delays in the investigation hampered it further. According to the lawsuit, the witness who overheard Bomkamp's comments was not interviewed until more than a year after the incident.</p> <p>This isn't the first time the Sheriff's Department has been sued over allegations of gender discrimination.</p> <p>In November, three black women who work in Pierce County Jail sued, claiming a pattern of discrimination and retaliation existed at the department that harmed minority employees. Court records show that Pierce County Superior Judge Thomas Quinlan agreed with the women's claims and ordered the county last month to pay the defendants a total \$850,000 in damages, plus about \$200,000 in attorney fees.</p> <p>And in 2017, the Pierce County Council approved a \$680,000 settlement for a similar lawsuit alleging a pattern of harassment and discrimination at the Sheriff's Department.</p> <p>According to Whitehead's lawsuit, the HR Department acknowledged that the Sheriff's Department has a history of sexist conduct in its report on her complaint. However, the investigator dismissed Whitehead's allegations and said the department's history of sexism actually made it less likely that she would have experienced sexism there.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Alaska Airlines SEA cancelations continue</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/business/alaska-airlines-flight-cancellations-at-sea-tac-airport-continue-monday/">https://www.seattletimes.com/business/alaska-airlines-flight-cancellations-at-sea-tac-airport-continue-monday/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Alaska Airlines continued to post cancellations Monday, though the airline said passengers were being warned and rebooked well before their flights.</p> <p>A shortage of pilots prompted Alaska, Seattle-Tacoma International Airport's largest carrier, to cut its spring schedule by 2% last week. Twenty flights through Sea-Tac had been canceled by Monday afternoon, according to <a href="http://FlightAware.com">FlightAware.com</a>, with additional cancellations expected Tuesday and Wednesday.</p> <p>The cancellations, though, were of a different sort than those earlier in April that saw passengers stuck and unable to reach the airline's customer service desk.</p> <p>"Guests are being notified in advance and they're being reaccommodated on other flights if their itinerary is impacted by crew-related cancellations," said Alexa Rudin, Alaska Airlines managing director for communications. Rudin said customers whose flights have been canceled should call a custom phone number included in the email notifying them of the cancellation.</p> <p>Rudin noted that flights cut as part of the 2% schedule reduction will "continue to show up as cancellations until the new schedule is fully loaded into our system at the end of this week."</p> <p>Staffing shortages have been largely to blame for hundreds of cancellations that have delayed or stranded tens of thousands of passengers. In the days after the cancellation run began April 1, some passengers reported 10-hour waits to reach the airline's customer service desk.</p> <p>Alaska and the union representing its pilots have been stalled on a new contract for three years. The dispute is the subject of federal mediation.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 WSF 'unprecedented' need of new recruits</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/washington-state-ferries-staffing-shortages/281-90b8acf7-e911-4cea-83a2-cf6692672810">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/washington-state-ferries-staffing-shortages/281-90b8acf7-e911-4cea-83a2-cf6692672810</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Officials with Washington State Ferries acknowledge it is short staffed and in need of dozens of new recruits.</p> <p>"It's not good, quite honestly. We don't have enough people to sail the vessels right now," Washington State Ferry spokesman Ian Sterling said on Monday as he stood outside the <a href="#">Seattle Maritime Academy</a>. "We need to hire, train, and get people out on the water."</p> <p>The admission comes after months of delays, cancellations, and unstable service on the water, whether it be in the San Juans, Bremerton, or Vashon Island.</p> <p>Sterling also acknowledged that last year's mandates were an issue.</p> <p>"That was certainly one factor, but even going into the pandemic we knew we were going to be short of employees," he said.</p> <p><a href="#">A March 8 report from the ferry system</a> states staff shortages are "unprecedented" in the ferry system's 70-year history.</p> <p>While stopping short of providing figures, Sterling said the Washington State Ferry system is competing with for-profit companies, particularly for engine room crews and that the system has hired "well over a hundred people in the last six months."</p> <p>A lack of diversity, and age of the employees, were also cited as factors by Sterling and Dale Bateman, who runs the Academy in Ballard.</p> <p>Bateman said a one-year program at the Academy costs about \$10,000 and a graduate can make between \$70,000-\$80,000 a year to start. The Academy and Washington State Ferries are teaming up to sponsor open houses on Tuesdays to solicit interest. The next one is scheduled for Tuesday, April 12, at 6 p.m.</p> <p>In 2021, Washington State Ferries operated approximately 22,000 fewer sailings than 2019 - roughly 72% of pre-pandemic ridership. In January, ridership slightly decreased compared to January 2021 levels, according to the March 8 report.</p> <p>Meanwhile, vessel availability has recovered, according to the March 8 report. However, availability remains at risk because of the aging fleet, according to the report. The ferry system had 24 vessels five years ago but now has 21 active vessels in the fleet.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Putin purges 100 FSB agents; retaliation?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/world/putin-purges-more-than-100-fsb-agents-in-apparent-retaliation-amid-ukraine-invasion-quagmire">https://www.foxnews.com/world/putin-purges-more-than-100-fsb-agents-in-apparent-retaliation-amid-ukraine-invasion-quagmire</a>
GIST	<p>Russia's invasion of Ukraine appears not to be going according to plan, and President Vladimir Putin seems intent on blaming his old colleagues at the Federal Security Bureau (FSB) – the intelligence agency successor to the KGB – for the quagmire.</p> <p>Putin reportedly purged more than 100 agents from the FSB, and his government sent the head of the department responsible for Ukraine to prison.</p> <p>About 150 FSB officers have been dismissed, The Times of London reported Monday. The ousted agents belonged to the Fifth Service, a division that Putin – then director of the FSB – set up in 1998 in order to carry out operations in the countries of the former Soviet Union, aiming to keep those countries in Russia's orbit.</p>

Authorities placed Sergei Beseda, the former head of the Fifth Service, under house arrest last month. He has since been moved to the FSB-run Lefortovo prison in Moscow, The Times reported. The NKVD, the KGB's predecessor, used the prison for interrogation and torture during Stalin's 1930s Great Purge.

This move sent a "very strong message" to other elites in Russia, Andrei Soldatov, an expert with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), told The Times.

"I was surprised by this," Soldatov said. "Putin could have very easily just fired him or sent him off to some regional job in Siberia. Lefortovo is not a nice place and sending him there is a signal as to how seriously Putin takes this stuff."

Soldatov suggested that Russian authorities may suspect Beseda of having passed information to the CIA.

Analysts previously told Fox News that Beseda's house arrest sentence seemed a form of retaliation for intelligence errors in Ukraine.

Soldatov said the Fifth Service represents "the most sensitive department of the FSB department, which is in charge of espionage in Ukraine. And now it looks like Vladimir Putin finally understood that the intelligence he was given before the invasion was not extremely accurate. And he has started looking around trying to find someone to blame."

While Russian troops fight to take ground in Ukraine, Moscow is also fighting an intelligence war. The U.S. FBI announced last week that it had disrupted a Russian military hacking scheme to set up a "botnet" on victim devices in the U.S. and elsewhere. Late last month, Ukrainian intelligence released a purported list of more than 600 Russian spies.

Rep. Ritchie Torres, D-N.Y., called on the FBI to investigate the Russian Diplomatic Compound, located in New York City, which experts previously told Fox News Digital houses diplomats who are in the U.S. to spy on America.

"We have been appalled and alarmed by Vladimir Putin's unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine. We have been appalled by his war crimes against the Ukrainian people, and it is in that context that I have formally requested that the FBI open an investigation into reports of espionage at the Russian diplomatic compound," Torres told reporters Tuesday about the white high-rise tower located at 355 West 255th Street, in the Bronx borough.

The Bronx Democrat called it "both metaphorically and literally a structure of surveillance."

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HEADLINE	04/11 What is a ghost gun?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-is-a-ghost-gun/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/what-is-a-ghost-gun/</a>
GIST	<p>The Biden administration unveiled <a href="#">new regulations</a> for "ghost guns" Monday in a move that advocates say will help reduce gun violence. The new rules will help law enforcement track and trace these firearms, which authorities say are increasingly involved in crimes.</p> <p><b>What is a ghost gun?</b></p> <p>Ghost guns are unregistered and untraceable homemade weapons that can be made with a 3D printer or assembled from a kit. According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, such weapons are contributing to a rise in gun violence, <a href="#">reported CBS News' Jeff Pegues</a> in February. The weapons can be produced for less than \$200, though officials have put the average price at around \$500.</p> <p>Countless websites offer kits for everything from handguns to AR-15s and AK-47s, as <a href="#">CBS News found in 2018</a>, when correspondent Carter Evans was able to purchase a kit for a gun similar to a Glock 9mm with no background check or waiting period.</p>



Current law requires firearms manufacturers to include serial numbers on weapons, but doesn't regulate most parts, making these types of assembled guns hard for authorities to trace. And buyers of kits aren't required to undergo background checks the way gun purchasers are — which authorities say allows people to skirt laws aimed at blocking certain gun purchases.

"If you're a felon or judged mentally unfit, for example, federal law says you're not supposed to have any kind of firearm. Build a ghost gun? No one knows you have it," Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva [told "60 Minutes"](#) correspondent Bill Whitaker in 2020.

It's generally legal to make a firearm for personal use, [according to the ATF](#). So, someone can make a gun at home — either with a kit or through 3D printing — [without a license](#).

### **How are ghost guns made?**

"You can buy a box of firearms parts, and you can assemble those firearms together. And I've seen videos on YouTube, where you can see people doing it in record time — 20, 30 minutes," ATF acting director Marvin Richardson [said](#) earlier this year.

One part — what's called the frame or lower receiver — is regulated under federal gun law. In a kit, that part has to be drilled out. But the kits generally come with the drill bits and guides necessary to do so, and there are tutorials easily available online, Evans [reported](#).

"Today, people can sit at home in their living room, log on to their computer, access a piece of software, send a signal to their printer, and print out a machine gun that can kill people. That's a problem," John Miller, the NYPD's deputy commissioner for intelligence and counterterrorism, [told CBS New York](#).

### **Why authorities say ghost guns are dangerous**

While ghost guns are only a fraction of the firearms involved in gun crimes, law enforcement [across the country](#) are pointing the finger at ghost guns as a growing problem.

"They're trying to appeal to a certain segment of the population," Dave Hamilton, then a senior special agent ATF, told Evans in 2018. "Felons who can't go to a gun store and legally purchase a firearm, or people who just don't want the government knowing what type of firearms they have."

A senior administration official said the ATF was able to trace fewer than 1% of the approximately 45,000 ghost guns recovered during criminal investigations between January 2016 and December 2021, [reported](#) CBS News' Bo Erickson. Almost 700 of the incidents were homicides or attempted homicides, the official said.

Ghost guns have been involved in school shootings, such as one in [Saugus, California](#), where a 16-year-old killed four people, and in mass shootings, like one in Northern California where a 44-year-old [used a ghost gun to kill five people](#) despite a court order prohibiting him from having guns.

The new regulations would mandate kits include serial numbers, and people who sell them would have to be federally licensed and run a background check on people purchasing kits. They would also be required to keep records of those purchases for as long as they're in business, rather than the 20 years under current requirements.

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HEADLINE	04/11 Russia media revenge plan on US
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-state-media-airs-its-ultimate-revenge-plan-for-2024-us-presidential-elections?ref=home">https://www.thedailybeast.com/russian-state-media-airs-its-ultimate-revenge-plan-for-2024-us-presidential-elections?ref=home</a>
GIST	As <a href="#">Russia's war of aggression</a> continues to ravage its neighbor, the Kremlin's propaganda apparatus has been more blatant than ever in outlining the country's goals for its biggest nemesis: the U.S.

Last week, American intelligence officials [reportedly](#) assessed that [Russian President Vladimir Putin](#) may use the Biden administration's support for Ukraine as a pretext to order a new campaign to interfere in U.S. elections. Though AP reported that "it is not yet clear which candidates Russia might try to promote or what methods it might use," Russian state media seem to be in agreement that [former U.S. President Donald Trump](#) remains Moscow's candidate of choice.

The time is coming "to again help our partner Trump to become president," state TV host Evgeny Popov [recently declared](#). On Thursday's edition of the state television show *The Evening With Vladimir Soloviev*, Putin's pet pundits offered an update on plans for 2024.

"We're trying to feel our way, figuring out the first steps. What can we do in 2023, 2024?," Russian "Americanist" Malek Dudakov, a political scientist specializing in the U.S., said. He suggested that Russia's interference in the upcoming elections is still in its early stages, and that more will be accomplished after the war is over and frosty relations between the U.S. and Russia start to warm up. "When things thaw out and the presidential race for 2024 is firmly on the agenda, there'll be moments we can use," he added. "The most banal approach I can think of is to invite Trump—before he announces he's running for President—to some future summit in liberated Mariupol."

Dmitry Drobnitsky, an omnipresent "Americanist" on Soloviev's show, suggested that [Tulsi Gabbard](#) should be invited along with Trump. Dudakov agreed: "Tulsi Gabbard would also be great. Maybe Trump will take her as his vice-president?" Gabbard has recently become a fixture of state television for her pro-Russian talking points, and has even [been described](#) as a "Russian agent" by the Kremlin's propaganda machine.

If state television is any indication, the real agenda of the Kremlin's operatives was never limited to boosting any particular candidates, but rather aimed to harm America as a whole. Dudakov stressed: "With Europe, economic wars should take priority. With America, we should be working to amplify the divisions and—in light of our limited abilities—to deepen the polarization of American society."

He went on: "There is a horrific polarization of society in the United States, very serious conflicts between the Democrats and Republicans that keep expanding. You've already mentioned that America is a dying empire—and most empires weren't conquered, they were destroyed from within. The same fate likely awaits America in the near decade. That's why, when all the processes are thawed, Russia might get the chance to play on that."

Dudakov's Twitter feed, which he maintains despite the service being blocked in Russia, offers a glimpse into his own propaganda efforts. Tweeting as "Duderman67," Dudakov focuses on criticizing U.S. President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and Hillary Clinton—while boosting Trump.

On his Thursday show, host Soloviev argued that Russia wasn't fighting against the United States with full competency just yet, and griped about losing the main weapon behind enemy lines: "the brilliantly working structure of RT," the Kremlin-funded state TV network that was banished from U.S. cable stations last month.

He then offered up his own ideas about how to influence American voters without the help of RT: "I would act through various diasporas. For example, I would work with the Spanish-speaking media—since America is becoming predominantly Spanish-speaking, with the colossal influence of Latin America, I would work through their press, through those narratives, moving in that direction... they aren't allowing us to work with American media directly, but we have many opportunities that we aren't using thus far."

Appearing on Soloviev's show two days earlier, Vitaly Tretyakov, dean of the Moscow State University's School of Television, complained that Russia: "had military hypersonic weapons, but we don't have informational hypersonic weapons... all of our forces need to be dedicated to that. We don't have info-weapons equal in strength to our hypersonic weapons... as opposed to what they have. You can't survive in this world without winning an info-war. That is out of the question."

	<p>Pundit Karen Shakhnazarov suggested: “I would find it useful to break diplomatic relations with the United States. I don’t see any point in maintaining them. And that would deliver a crushing blow to Biden. There are plenty of people in the U.S. who say that he is bringing us all to the edge of nuclear war. That will be a strong signal.”</p> <p>That wasn’t the only talk of nuclear war on Soloviev’s show this week. On Thursday, Soloviev confirmed a well-known concept frequently aired on state media when he acknowledged: “De facto, we aren’t fighting a campaign against Ukraine, but against the entire West.” A parade of pundits recounted various ways U.S. sanctions are affecting the Russian economy, and the limited avenues for Russian retaliation. Soloviev resorted to pulling out his beloved trump card designed to intimidate the West: the threat of nuclear war. He asked: “Maybe it’s time we strike them? Since we’re already a pariah state, a war criminal, if everything is so bad.”</p> <p>Short of nuclear holocaust, it is now clear that Russia is focusing its efforts on distracting America from its foreign policy objectives by threatening to meddle in U.S. internal affairs. Speaking about the upcoming midterm elections on Soloviev’s show last week, Konstantin Dolgov, the deputy chairman of the Committee on Economic Policy of Russia’s Federation Council, predicted that “the results will apparently not be good for the Democrats,” because of rising gas prices in the U.S. But the midterms, he emphasized, are “just a rehearsal. The main elections are further ahead and preparations for those are already underway.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Philadelphia reinstates indoor masks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Health/philadelphia-reinstates-indoor-mask-mandate-infections-rise/story?id=84018786">https://abcnews.go.com/Health/philadelphia-reinstates-indoor-mask-mandate-infections-rise/story?id=84018786</a>
GIST	<p>Philadelphia has become the first major U.S. city to reinstate its indoor mask mandate, following an increase in COVID-19 infections, in recent weeks.</p> <p>Beginning April 18, masks will be required in all indoor public spaces, including schools, child care settings, businesses, restaurants and government buildings.</p> <p>"I sincerely wish we didn't have to do this again. I wish this pandemic was over just as much as any of you, but I am very worried about our vulnerable neighbors and loved ones. My hope that our actions today will slow the spread of COVID and help us avoid seeing our ERs, once again, gets so crowded, that people can't get timely care when they need it," Health Commissioner Cheryl Bettigole said during a press conference on Monday.</p> <p>The city will implement a one-week "education period" to ensure that all residents are made aware of the change in protocols. For now, however, there is no vaccine or testing requirement for establishments that serve food or beverages.</p> <p>Over the last week, new cases per capita have increased by more than 50%, and daily case rates have risen past 100, according to city data. However, overall, COVID-19 related hospitalizations remain low.</p> <p>"We hope that by having folks masks up whenever they're in public indoor spaces, we can get ahead of the wave and keep it from reaching a peak like we saw in January with the omicron variant. If we could do that we can literally save the lives of vulnerable Philadelphians," Bettigole said.</p> <p>Bettigole said that at this time, there is no reason to "panic or to avoid activities." She stressed that the city remains open, but wearing masks will allow those activities to continue, while keeping all residents safe.</p> <p>"If we start to see a different pattern than that of previous waves of the virus, we'll review our metrics to see if there are opportunities to be less restrictive," Bettigole added.</p>

Several colleges and universities have also moved to reinstate masking requirements, given the increasing number of students and staff testing positive on-campus.

On Sunday, Columbia University in New York City announced it would require masks again in classrooms — a policy that is expected to last through the end of the semester.

"Continued caution in certain situations remains extremely important, particularly in indoor social settings when the vaccination status of attendees is unknown or uncertain," Donna Lynne, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, said in a statement.

Between Apr. 4 and Apr. 10, 133 students have tested positive — the highest weekly total since mid-January, according to university data.

Last week, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., temporarily reinstated an indoor mask requirement for its main and medical campuses, after seeing a "significant increase" in COVID-19 cases on-campus.

"This increase is partly due to the impact of the BA.2 Omicron subvariant. BA.2 is now the dominant strain in the United States, including in DC and on our campuses," school officials wrote in a statement last week. "These circumstances present a challenge, but we have learned to adjust our mitigation measures to respond to changing conditions throughout the pandemic. Another adjustment is needed now to curb transmission on campus."

In recent weeks, a flurry of positive COVID-19 infections has disrupted life in Washington, D.C., as many top officials and politicians have tested positive for the virus.

American University, Johns Hopkins University, Rice University, have all also issued similar masking requirements.

However, school officials reported that there have been no known cases of serious illness.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Philippines: heavy rains, floods kill dozens</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/heavy-rains-kill-25-people-philippines-84011813">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/heavy-rains-kill-25-people-philippines-84011813</a>
GIST	<p>MANILA, Philippines -- Heavy rains caused by a summer tropical depression killed at least 25 people in the central and southern Philippines, mostly due to landslides, officials said Monday.</p> <p>Twenty-two villagers died in landslides in four villages in Baybay city in central Leyte province on Sunday and Monday, city police chief Lt. Col. Joemen Collado said. At least six other people were reported missing in the landslides and a search was underway, he said.</p> <p>Three other storm-related deaths were reported by the government's main disaster-response agency in the southern provinces of Davao de Oro and Davao Oriental.</p> <p>"In one village, a landslide occurred and other victims, unfortunately, were also swept away by the surge of water," Collado told the DZBB radio network. "There were at least six missing but there could be more."</p> <p>Nearly 200 floods were reported in different areas in central and southern provinces over the weekend, displacing about 30,000 families, some of which were moved to emergency shelters, officials said.</p> <p>Coast guard, police and firefighters rescued some villagers in flooded communities, including some who were trapped on their roofs. In central Cebu city, schools and work were suspended Monday and Mayor Michael Rama declared a state of calamity to allow the rapid release of emergency funds.</p>

	<p>At least 20 storms and typhoons batter the Philippines each year, mostly during the rainy season that begins around June. Some storms have hit even during the scorching summer months in recent years.</p> <p>The disaster-prone Southeast Asian nation also lies on the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” where many of the world’s volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 South Lebanon: building explosion kills 1</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explosion-south-lebanon-kills-injures-84027313">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/explosion-south-lebanon-kills-injures-84027313</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>SIDON, Lebanon -- An explosion ripped through a building in southern Lebanon early on Tuesday, killing one person and wounding seven, a Lebanese security official said.</p> <p>The blast in the town of Banaafoul, near the port city of Sidon, demolished the two-floor building that had served as a municipality building and a scout center for the Shiite Amal movement.</p> <p>According to the security official, the dead person was the son of the town’s mayor. It was not immediately clear what triggered the blast, which also caused material damage to nearby buildings and cars.</p> <p>The official said the explosion may have been caused by diesel fuel stored inside the building. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to give official statements.</p> <p>Other unconfirmed reports said the building contained a weapons cache. Army personnel sealed off the building as they searched through the rubble for clues and casualties.</p> <p>Late last year, arms stored for the Palestinian Hamas group exploded in a building in a Palestinian refugee camp in the south Lebanon port city of Tyre, injuring a dozen people. Hamas denied it had kept weapons there and said the explosion was caused by oxygen tanks stored in the building.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Pakistan opposition leader elected new PM</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistani-lawmakers-elect-pm-imran-khan-ouster-84008537">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistani-lawmakers-elect-pm-imran-khan-ouster-84008537</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>ISLAMABAD -- Pakistan’s parliament on Monday elected opposition lawmaker Shahbaz Sharif as the new prime minister, following a week of political turmoil that led to the weekend ouster of Premier Imran Khan.</p> <p>Sharif took the oath of office inside the stately, white marble palace known as the Presidency in a brief ceremony.</p> <p>But his elevation won't guarantee a peaceful path forward or solve the country's many economic problems, including high inflation and a soaring energy crisis.</p> <p>Sharif, the brother of disgraced former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, won with 174 votes after more than 100 lawmakers from Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, or Pakistan Justice Party, resigned and walked out of the National Assembly in protest.</p> <p>Those 174 votes — two more than the required simple majority — are enough to pass laws in the 342-seat assembly. If Khan's followers take to the streets, as he has vowed, it could create more pressure on lawmakers and deepen the crisis.</p> <p>Khan, a former cricket star whose conservative Islamist ideology and dogged independence characterized his three years and eight months in office, was ousted early Sunday. He lost a no-confidence vote after being deserted by his party allies and a key coalition partner.</p>

In a show of strength and a precursor to the political uncertainty ahead, Khan rallied hundreds of thousands of supporters in protests Sunday night, describing the new leadership as an “imposed government” that colluded with the U.S. to oust him. His backers marched in cities across Pakistan, waving large party flags and shouted slogans promising to return him to power. The crowds were dominated by youths who make up the backbone of Khan’s supporters.

The political drama began April 3 when Khan sidestepped an initial no-confidence vote demanded by the opposition by dissolving parliament and calling early elections. The opposition, which accuses Khan of economic mismanagement, appealed to the Supreme Court. After four days of deliberations, the court said Khan's move was illegal and the no-confidence vote went ahead, leading to his ouster.

Khan has demanded early elections — the balloting is not due before August 2023. He has tapped into anti-American sentiment in Pakistan, accusing Washington of conspiring with his opponents to topple him. That conspiracy theory resonates with his youthful base, which often sees the U.S. war on terrorism after 9/11 as unfairly targeting Pakistan.

Khan claims Washington opposes him because of his independent foreign policy favoring China and Russia. He was criticized for a visit he made on Feb. 24 to Moscow, where he met with President Vladimir Putin as Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine.

The U.S. State Department has denied any involvement in Pakistan’s internal politics.

China, which is Pakistan's key ally and investor, said Monday it would support any government.

“As Pakistan’s close neighbor and iron-clad friend, we sincerely hope that all factions in Pakistan will remain united and work together for national stability and development,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said at a briefing. “I would like to emphasize that no matter how the political situation changes in Pakistan, China will unswervingly adhere to its friendly policy toward Pakistan.”

China is heavily invested in Pakistan in its multibillion-dollar global initiative to link south and central Asia to Beijing.

Pakistan's longtime rival India also sent congratulations to Sharif, with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying his country “desires peace and stability.” The two countries have fought three wars, coming dangerously close to a fourth over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir, which is divided between the two and claimed by both.

The opposition coalition consists of parties that cross the political divide, from the left to the radically religious. The two largest parties are the Pakistan Muslim League, headed by Sharif, and the Pakistan People's Party, co-chaired by the son and husband of Benazir Bhutto, the former prime minister who was killed in 2007.

A few wealthy and powerful families have dominated Pakistan's politics for decades, with power most often alternating between the Sharif and the Bhutto camps. Both political houses have been accused of and at times convicted of widespread corruption. They have dismissed the allegations as being politically motivated.

Nawaz Sharif was unseated by the Supreme Court in 2015 after being convicted of financial irregularities revealed in the so-called Panama Papers — a collection of leaked secret financial documents showing how some of the world’s richest hide their money and involving a global law firm based in Panama. He was disqualified from holding office by the Supreme Court.

Asif Ali Zardari, Bhutto's husband who served as president of Pakistan after the 2008 election, has spent more than seven years in prison, convicted on corruption charges.



	<p>Khan came to power in 2018, promising to break the pattern of family rule in Pakistan, but his opponents said he was elected with help from the powerful military, which has ruled the country for half of its 75-year history.</p> <p>Nawaz Sharif was also ousted in 1999, in a military coup, and Benazir Bhutto's government was ousted several times after the military sided with her opposition. In Pakistani politics, where loyalties are often fluid, Bhutto's fiercest opposition often came from Sharif's party.</p> <p>Shahbaz Sharif has served three times as chief minister of Pakistan's largest, most influential Punjab province, home to 60% of the country's 220 million people. His son, Hamza, was elected last week as the new chief minister by the Punjab provincial parliament, ousting Khan's nominee. Khan's party is challenging that election, and the younger Sharif has yet to be sworn in.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 China delivers military supplies to Serbia</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-regular-military-supplies-delivered-serbia-84008612">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/china-regular-military-supplies-delivered-serbia-84008612</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING -- China said Monday its military planes delivered “regular military supplies” to Serbia, in its first comments on an unusual operation in which six Chinese Air Force Y-20 transport planes landed in Belgrade early Saturday.</p> <p>Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian told reporters the operation was part of the two countries’ annual cooperation plan, does not target any third parties and “has nothing to do with the current situation.”</p> <p>Zhao gave no further details.</p> <p>The planes’ arrival prompted heavy speculation they were carrying HQ-22 surface-to-air missiles under the terms of a previous deal signed between the sides. Serbia’s defense ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.</p> <p>Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic all but confirmed the delivery of the medium-range systems that was agreed to in 2019, saying on Saturday that he will present “the newest pride” of the Serbian military on Tuesday or Wednesday.</p> <p>The veiled operation this weekend came amid Western concerns that an arms buildup in the Balkans at the same time as war is raging in Ukraine could threaten the region.</p> <p>Serbia and China have long shared strong ties, partly out of a common disdain for Washington. Serbians nurture resentment over NATO's 1999 air campaign during the Kosovo conflict, in which the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade was hit. NATO called the incident, which sparked violent demonstrations in Beijing, a mistaken bombing, an explanation China and many others have long rejected.</p> <p>Despite claiming to be neutral, China has largely sided with Russia in the Ukraine conflict and many Serbians are sympathetic to Moscow. Although Serbia has voted in favor of U.N. resolutions that condemn the Russian attacks in Ukraine, it has refused to join international sanctions against its allies in Moscow or to outright criticize actions by the Russian troops there.</p> <p>The apparent arms delivery to Serbia over the territories of at least two NATO member states, Turkey and Bulgaria, was seen by experts as a demonstration of China’s growing global reach.</p> <p>The weekend flights “could be the largest overseas operation by the Chinese domestically developed large transport plane yet, displaying the country’s strategic transport capabilities,” the Communist Party newspaper Global Times said Monday, citing Chinese defense analysts.</p>

The Y-20, which was first delivered to the People's Liberation Army Air Force in 2015, has been used in overseas missions before, including the dispatch of 105 members of the PLA honor guard to join the 2020 Russian Victory Day parade in Moscow, and in flights near Taiwan's air space aimed at testing the self-governing island's defenses and intimidating its democratic government.

There are fears in the West that the arming of Serbia by Russia and China could encourage the Balkan country to move toward another war, especially against its former province of Kosovo that proclaimed independence in 2008. Serbia, Russia and China don't recognize Kosovo's statehood, while the United States and most Western countries do.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Austrian chancellor tells Putin: 'end war'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/austrian-chancellor-tells-putin-end-ukraine-war-84015647">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/austrian-chancellor-tells-putin-end-ukraine-war-84015647</a>
GIST	<p>VIENNA -- Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer said Monday that he urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the invasion of Ukraine and raised the issue of "serious war crimes" committed by the Russian military.</p> <p>Nehammer was the first European leader to meet Putin in Moscow since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine Feb. 24.</p> <p>In a statement released after the meeting, the Austrian chancellor said his primary message to Putin in the "very direct, open and tough" talks was that "this war needs to end, because in war both sides can only lose."</p> <p>Nehammer told Putin all those responsible for war crimes in the Ukrainian city of Bucha and elsewhere would be "held to account."</p> <p>He also stressed the need to open humanitarian corridors so that civilians trapped in cities under attack can access basic supplies like food and water, according to his statement.</p> <p>The Austrian leader called the Moscow trip to Moscow his "duty" to exhaust every possibility for ending the violence in Ukraine, coming just two days after travelling to Kyiv for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.</p> <p>Speaking at a news conference in Moscow, Nehammer said face-to-face talks to look "each other in the eye, discussing the horrors of war," could have a greater impact over the long term.</p> <p>But he said he walked away from the meeting without much optimism for an end to the war any time soon.</p> <p>"It might be necessary to do it 100 times," Nehammer said of the meeting. "But I think it's necessary to do it, so that peace reigns again and the people of Ukraine can live safely."</p> <p>European Union-member Austria supported the 27-nation bloc's sanctions against Russia, though it so far has opposed cutting off deliveries of Russian gas. The country is militarily neutral and is not a member of NATO.</p> <p>But Nehammer and other Austrian officials have been keen to stress that military neutrality does not mean moral neutrality.</p> <p>"We are militarily neutral, but have a clear position on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine," Nehammer wrote on Twitter Sunday when announcing his trip to Moscow. "It must stop!"</p> <p>Nehammer said he told Putin the EU is "as united as it's ever been" on the issue of sanctions, and that these will remain in place - and may even be strengthened - as long as Ukrainians continue to die.</p>

	<p>Earlier Monday, Austrian foreign minister Alexander Schallenberg said Nehammer decided to make the Moscow trip after meeting with Zelenskyy in Kyiv and following contacts with the leaders of Turkey, Germany and the European Union.</p> <p>Schallenberg said ahead of a meeting with his EU counterparts in Luxembourg that it was an effort to "seize every chance to end the humanitarian hell" in Ukraine.</p> <p>He added that "every voice that makes clear to President Putin what reality looks like outside the walls of Kremlin is not a wasted voice."</p>
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## Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 BlackCat claims university ransom attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/blackcat-ransomware-group-claims-attack-on-florida-international-university/">https://therecord.media/blackcat-ransomware-group-claims-attack-on-florida-international-university/</a>
GIST	<p>The BlackCat (ALPHV) ransomware group says it has struck again, with Florida International University as their latest victim.</p> <p>The ransomware group, which most recently <a href="#">attacked North Carolina A&amp;T University</a>, claimed it has stolen a range of personal information from students, teachers and staff. Within the 1.2 TB of data it claims to have taken are contracts, accounting documents, social security numbers, email databases and more.</p> <p>When asked for comment, the university shared a message it sent out to campus on Friday.</p> <p>"Today, a ransomware group posted that sensitive FIU data had been exfiltrated. We have been investigating and there is no indication thus far that sensitive information has been compromised. At this time, no further information is available," the university said.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the university did not respond to follow-up questions about the group's claims. Cybersecurity experts who looked at the allegedly stolen data confirmed that it did include sensitive information from staff and students at the university.</p> <p>The attack would make Florida International University the eighth reported US university or college hit with ransomware in 2022 after Ohlone College, Savannah State University, University of Detroit Mercy, Centralia College, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas, National University College and North Carolina A&amp;T University.</p> <p>Recorded Future ransomware expert Allan Liska said through March of 2022, his team has recorded 37 publicly reported ransomware attacks against schools, compared to 127 in all of 2021. The Record is an editorially independent publication owned by Recorded Future.</p> <p>The first 3 months of this year have seen more attacks than in any previous year, Liska added.</p> <p>BlackCat has attacked at least three of the US universities or colleges. Emsisoft threat analyst Brett Callow and others believe the group is a <a href="#">rebrand of the BlackMatter and DarkSide ransomware</a> groups. The group has so far been implicated in attacks <a href="#">on two German oil companies</a> and <a href="#">Italian fashion brand Moncler</a>.</p> <p>Callow noted that while many organizations initially say there is "no evidence information has been compromised," that is often not the case.</p> <p>"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. In previous incidents, multiple organizations which initially stated they had no evidence of data being compromised later discovered that it had been — usually, when the attackers released it online," Callow said.</p>

HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Feds release wrong files in hacker case?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cyberscoop.com/prosecutors-russian-hacker-insider-trading-mistake-documents-trump/">https://www.cyberscoop.com/prosecutors-russian-hacker-insider-trading-mistake-documents-trump/</a>
GIST	<p>Federal prosecutors working the insider trading and hacking case against a Russian millionaire extradited to the U.S. in December inadvertently gave the Russian’s lawyers materials from separate, non-related cases, the suspect’s lawyer said in a court filing last week.</p> <p>The material included “individuals and phone records that do not seem to be related to this case,” and “other potential cases involving Russian businessmen with potential ties to the former Trump administration,” the April 5 filing reads.</p> <p>Maksim Nemtsev — the Boston-based lawyer representing a Russian tech executive, <a href="#">Vladislav Klyushin, 41, who stands accused of insider trading</a> based on hacked non-public information — included the claim in an April 5 filing protesting Klyushin’s pretrial detention. The federal magistrate in the case, Marianne Bowler, denied bail for Klyushin Jan. 24 based on his lack of ties to the U.S., “substantial financial means,” an alleged “degree of sophistication needed to facilitate clandestine flight” and the fact that his co-defendants in the case have yet to be arrested.</p> <p>Nemtsev’s filing also noted that the defense is “investigating” whether some of the files produced by the government in response to a grand jury subpoena may have been altered. In an attached exhibit, the defense points to a spreadsheet that may have been modified by an FBI agent working the case, according to a preliminary review.</p> <p>Reached by phone last week, Nemtsev declined to comment on the specifics of any material turned over by the government. Prosecutors said the material was “included erroneously and asked us that we delete it,” Nemtsev told CyberScoop.</p> <p>“It just makes our job as a defense attorney a little more difficult because now we have to sort through everything, and some of it seems to have no relevance,” Nemtsev said.</p> <p>In a subsequent conversation, Nemtsev said that he believes the material from the cases involving the Russian businessmen have yet to be charged. “That’s why I don’t want to disclose the names or anything else. If there is a potential ongoing investigation obviously we don’t want to compromise it,” he said.</p> <p>Barbara McQuade, a law professor at the University of Michigan and former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan, told CyberScoop that it’s not exactly clear what happened in this case, and stressed that it would be important to hear the prosecutors’ explanation before drawing conclusions.</p> <p>It’s possible that the records turned over somehow relate to Klyushin’s case, perhaps in terms of common witnesses or overlapping evidence, she said. That said, “if it were a mistake, it is not one I have seen before.” The seriousness of the problem would depend on the other case, she added.</p> <p>“If the case is not yet charged, it could compromise the case. If the case is already charged, then sharing discovery material beyond the parties in the case could violate court orders or compromise witnesses,” she said.</p> <p>A media representative for the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Massachusetts, where the case is being worked, declined to comment.</p> <p>One of Nemtsev’s main arguments in fighting pretrial detention is that it’s hard for Klyushin to fully participate in his defense and analyze the U.S. government’s evidence while behind bars. Prosecutors have turned over more than five terabytes of discovery containing more than 1 million individual files, Nemtsev said in the filing, and Klyushin is only given 16 hours of access to the database per week. The database is also not searchable, and there are format issues making it difficult, he added.</p>

### Other elements of the case

Klyushin was originally arrested in Switzerland on March 21, 2021, and extradited to the U.S. on Dec. 18, 2021. [Federal prosecutors claim](#) that between January 2018 and September 2020, Klyushin and his co-defendants hacked into two U.S. firms that help publicly traded companies prepare filings for public release, and then used that information to trade stocks ahead of the release. The campaign netted the group at least \$82.5 million, prosecutors allege.

One of Klyushin's co-defendants, Ivan Yermakov, was already under U.S. indictment, having been [one of the 12 Russian nationals indicted](#) as part of Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election as part of a Russian military intelligence (GRU) hacking unit. He'd [also been indicted](#) for his alleged role in hacking various anti-doping agencies, sporting federations, and anti-doping officials.

An attorney representing Klyushin in his fight against extradition from Switzerland [told NBC News in December](#) that Klyushin had previously rebuffed approaches by U.S. and British intelligence agencies while traveling in Europe. The insider trading charges were "disingenuous," attorney Oliver Ciric said at the time, noting that Klyushin's social media monitoring and cybersecurity consulting firm, M-13, "had a series of government contracts in Russia, including with some of the national intelligence agencies."

"That's not something that's come up in our case," Nemtsev told CyberScoop.

In another development this week, high-profile criminal defense attorney Marc Fernich joined Klyushin's legal team. Fernich's [website lists "Notable Clients"](#) such as Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman Loero, Jeffrey Epstein, John A. Gotti, hip-hop superstar Kurtis Blow and Keith Raniere, the [convicted sex trafficker behind the infamous Nxivm sex cult](#).

Fernich did not respond to a request for comment.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Google sues crook using puppies as lures</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cyberscoop.com/google-goes-after-cameroonian-cybercriminal-using-puppies-as-lures/">https://www.cyberscoop.com/google-goes-after-cameroonian-cybercriminal-using-puppies-as-lures/</a>
GIST	<p>Google filed a lawsuit Monday against a Cameroonian man, accusing him of creating scam websites that promise to "sell adorable puppies," only to take victims' money as part of a sprawling network of non-delivery scams.</p> <p>According to Google's lawsuit, someone going by the name of Nche Noel Ntse registered dozens of "fraudulent" Google accounts to set up multiple Gmail and Google Voice accounts to "communicate false promises to victims" and set up fraudulent websites to facilitate the fraud.</p> <p>Google is seeking to block the person from accessing or attempting to access any Google services, create any Google accounts or engage in any activity that violates Google's Terms of Service agreements.</p> <p>The fraud is part of a <a href="#">"dramatic increase" in online scams</a> during the COVID-19 pandemic as people shop more online and less in person. A variety of studies <a href="#">have looked at "puppy scams"</a> in particular, where perpetrators, typically abroad, pose as breeders with puppies for sale.</p> <p>"These scammers tend to post photos and videos of adorable puppies with prices that are too good to be true and ask for payment upfront through wire payments, gift cards, or direct transfer apps," Google's lawyers wrote in the complaint. After the first round of payments, the <a href="#">scammers</a> will add on additional payments such as animal quarantine and delivery fees.</p> <p>According to the lawsuit, in August 2021, the AARP received a complaint from a South Carolina resident who reported that they were looking for a puppy online. They came across a site called "familyhomebassetthounds[.]com" and sought to purchase a specific puppy.</p>

<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>Someone with a Gmail email account and a Google Voice account told the victim to pay for the dog by sending \$700 in gift cards to a specific place. The victim was then told the shipping company needed an additional \$1,500 to deliver the puppy, which never came.</p> <p>Google's investigation of the matter revealed "a network" of Google services accounts being used in other non-delivery schemes linked together subscriber and recovery email addresses, phone numbers, and login IP addresses. One of the older Gmail accounts was created in September 2013 from an IP address in Cameroon and had a phone number with the with the country code for Cameroon, the complaint states.</p> <p>The scam websites have been suspended in the past, but others pop up. By the time Google investigated, the website used to target the victim in South Carolina had been pulled down. But a Google Ads account that ran ads for that site was also running ads for "emilypuppyfarm[.]com," a site registered on March 27, 2022 that was still accessible as of April 11....</p> <p>"The recency of this site shows that Defendant will continue to perpetrate fraud and abuse Google's services unless stopped," the lawyers wrote in the complaint, noting that Google suspended the Google Ads account and requested to have the site pulled down through the company hosting the site.</p> <p>Another site controlled by the suspect purported to sell marijuana and prescription opiate cough syrup. That site was accessible through April 7, Google's lawyers wrote, when it was taken down at Google's request. It never sold the items as it "was yet another non-delivery scheme."</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 New TDS Parrot infects web servers</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/over-16500-sites-hacked-to-distribute.html">https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/over-16500-sites-hacked-to-distribute.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>A new traffic direction system (TDS) called Parrot has been spotted leveraging tens of thousands of compromised websites to launch further malicious campaigns.</p> <p>"The TDS has infected various web servers hosting more than 16,500 websites, ranging from adult content sites, personal websites, university sites, and local government sites," Avast researchers Pavel Novák and Jan Rubín <a href="#">said</a> in a report published last week.</p> <p>Traffic direction systems are used by threat actors to determine whether or not a target is of interest and should be redirected to a malicious domain under their control and act as a gateway to compromise their systems with malware.</p> <p>Earlier this January, the BlackBerry Research and Intelligence Team detailed another TDS called <a href="#">Prometheus</a> that has been put to use in different campaigns mounted by cybercriminal groups to distribute Campo Loader, Hancitor, IcedID, QBot, Buer Loader, and SocGholish malware.</p> <p>What makes Parrot TDS stand out is its huge reach, with increased activity observed in February and March 2022, as its operators have primarily singled out servers hosting poorly secured WordPress sites to gain administrator access.</p> <p>Most of the users targeted by these malicious redirects are located in Brazil, India, the U.S, Singapore, Indonesia, Argentina, France, Mexico, Pakistan, and Russia.</p> <p>"The infected sites' appearances are altered by a campaign called FakeUpdate (also known as SocGholish), which uses JavaScript to display fake notices for users to update their browser, offering an update file for download," the researchers said. "The file observed being delivered to victims is a remote access tool."</p> <p>Parrot TDS, via an injected PHP script hosted on the compromised server, is designed to extract client information and forward the request to the command-and-control (C2) server upon visiting one of the infected sites, in addition to allowing the attacker to perform arbitrary code execution on the server.</p>



	<p>The response from the C2 server takes the form of JavaScript code that's executed on the client machine, exposing the victims to potential new threats. Also observed alongside the malicious backdoor PHP script is a web shell that grants the adversary persistent remote access to the web server.</p> <p>Calling the criminal actors behind the FakeUpdate campaign a prevalent customer of Parrot TDS, Avast said the attacks involved prompting users to download malware under the guise of rogue browser updates, a remote access trojan named "ctfmon.exe" that gives the attacker full access to the host.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Finding attack paths in cloud environment</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/finding-attack-paths-in-cloud.html">https://thehackernews.com/2022/04/finding-attack-paths-in-cloud.html</a>
GIST	<p>The mass adoption of cloud infrastructure is fully justified by innumerable advantages. As a result, today, organizations' most sensitive business applications, workloads, and data are in the cloud.</p> <p>Hackers, good and bad, have noticed that trend and effectively evolved their attack techniques to match this new tantalizing target landscape. With threat actors' high reactivity and adaptability, it is recommended to assume that organizations are under attack and that some user accounts or applications might already have been compromised.</p> <p>Finding out exactly which assets are put at risk through compromised accounts or breached assets requires mapping potential attack paths across a comprehensive map of all the relationships between assets.</p> <p>Today, mapping potential attack paths is performed with scanning tools such as AzureHound or AWSPX. Those are graph-based tools enabling the visualization of assets and resources relationships within the related cloud service provider.</p> <p>By resolving policy information, these collectors determine how specific access paths affect specific resources and how combining these access paths might be used to create attack paths.</p> <p>These graph-based collectors display topological results mapping out all cloud-hosted entities in the environment and the relationships between them.</p> <p>The links between each entity established in the resulting graph are analyzed according to the asset's properties to extract the exact nature of the relationship and the logical interaction between assets based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationship direction - is the connection direction from asset X to asset Y or the other way round.</li> <li>• The relationship type – is asset X: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contained by asset Y</li> <li>• Can access asset Y</li> <li>• Can act on asset Y</li> <li>• ...</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>The goal of the information provided is to assist red teamers in identifying potential lateral movement and privilege escalation attack paths and blue teamers in finding ways to block critical escalation and stop an attacker.</p> <p>The keyword in that sentence is "assist." The comprehensive mapping output they generate is a passive result, inasmuch as the information needs to be accurately and timely analyzed and acted upon to effectively map potential attack paths and take preventative measures.</p> <p>Though the information provided by cloud-specific collectors will shine a light on misconfiguration in Privileged Access Management and faulty Identity Access Manager (IAM) policies and enable preemptive corrective action, it fails to detect potential secondary permission layers that an attacker could leverage to carve an attack path.</p>

This requires additional analytical capabilities able to perform in-depth analysis on, for example, containing assets and the passive relationships relative to the contained assets. Cymulate is currently developing a toolkit that operationalizes a more active discovery approach that performs a far more in-depth analysis.

For example, if we imagine a situation where privileged user A has access to the key vault X, a graph-based collector will correctly map the relationship between user A and asset X.

In this case, there is no direct relationship between user A and the secrets contained in key vault X. As per the classification above, if we call the secrets assets Y(1 to n), the relationships described by the collector are:

- Asset Y is contained by Asset X
- The direction of the connection between user A and asset X is  $A \Rightarrow X$ .

From an adversarial perspective, though, gaining access to the key vault holds the potential of gaining access to all the assets accessible via those secrets. In other words, the graph-based relationship map fails to identify the relationships between user A to assets Y(1 to n). This requires analytical capabilities enabling the identification of the relationships between assets contained within other assets and assets external to the containing asset.

In this case, finding out exactly which assets are potentially at risk from user A requires mapping out all the assets related to the secrets stored in key vault X.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Cash App breach illustrates insider threat</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/identity-and-access/cash-app-breach-demonstrates-threat-posed-by-past-and-present-employees">https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/identity-and-access/cash-app-breach-demonstrates-threat-posed-by-past-and-present-employees</a>
GIST	<p>A recent compromise of the investment arm of Block Inc.'s fast-growing Cash App, which has been favored by Generation Z and Millennial customers, demonstrates the risk of insider fraud from former as well as existing employees.</p> <p>Last week news broke of a major data loss from the popular peer-to-peer payment (P2P) service, when financial regulator the SEC released a filing that <a href="#">charged a former Cash App employee</a> with stealing the personal information of 8 million users. The Cash App investing data theft in question happened in December 2021, when the former Cash App employee downloaded customer names, brokerage account numbers, and in some cases their portfolio details and value, their holdings and certain trading activity.</p> <p>According to information from Block Inc, this data heist should not affect the wider group of 44 million users of Cash App's popular P2P service. But it does raise concerns about the risk and reliability tied to financial employees.</p> <p>"The Block/Cash App breach highlights what we already know: that users are the biggest risk to a company's sensitive data," says Harris Schwartz, chief information security officer of Elevate Security, noting that eight or nine out of 10 breaches involve a human. "But the vast majority of those breaches are not from <a href="#">malicious insiders</a>, and their methods are identical to malicious outsiders who have already gained access to an authorized account or sensitive assets."</p> <p>"There is a much greater risk from internal users that unwittingly click on a bad link or download malware," Schwartz adds. "The smartest thing companies can do is understand the behaviors and identify the users that pose the highest risk to their organization."</p> <p>In the <a href="#">SEC filing</a>, Block (parent company of Cash App) admitted that the former employee in question had previously been allowed to download reports and customer information for their job. "While this employee</p>

	<p>had regular access to these reports as part of their past job responsibilities, in this instance these reports were accessed without permission after their employment ended,” said the SEC filing.</p> <p>While the employee had regular access to these reports as part of past job responsibilities, according to the filing, “in this instance these reports were accessed without permission after their employment ended.” And, while this attack appears to have been the result of a malicious former employee, the vast majority of intrusions come as a result of employees’ unintended mistakes.</p> <p>“There is a much greater risk from internal users that unwittingly click on a bad link or download malware,” says Schwartz. “The smartest thing companies can do is understand the behaviors and identify the users that pose the highest risk to their organization.”</p> <p>Even prior to the news of this data theft, Cash App has been under fire by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and several state attorneys over its handling of “customer complaints and disputes.”</p> <p>In this attack, there may have been an “incomplete termination of access” when the employee was let go, according to Tessian CISO Josh Yavor. “Large or small, no organization is immune to this type of risk, and this is one of the most common security challenges for any organization,” says Yavor. “While it often seems simple on the surface, the complexity of ensuring that all employee access is removed in a timely manner at the end of employment is rarely an easy task.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Anonymous hits 3 Russia entities</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-hits-russian-entities-leaks-400-gb-emails/">https://www.hackread.com/anonymous-hits-russian-entities-leaks-400-gb-emails/</a>
GIST	<p>The online hacktivist collective <a href="#">Anonymous</a> has hit three more targets in its ongoing operation #OpRussia against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. One of the Anonymous representatives on Twitter (@YourAnonTV) also tweeted about the hack and revealed that “Anonymous leaked over 400,000 new emails from Russia including well over 100,000 emails from the oil, gas, and logging industries.”</p> <p><b>Companies Affected by the Leak</b></p> <p>Hackers leaked around 437,500 emails belonging to Aerogas, Forest, and Petrovsky Fort. The data leak comprises 244 GB worth of information including 300,000 emails from Petrovsky Fort, which owns the largest office complexes in Saint-Petersburg, Russia’s 2nd largest city.</p> <p>The second firm affected by this leak is Aerogas. Hackers leaked 145 GB worth of information including 100,000 emails of the engineering firm that caters to Russia’s oil and gas sector. Aerogas clients include Rosneft, Russia’s largest producer of oil, and Novatek, the country’s leading natural gas producer.</p> <p>It is worth noting that both Aerogas and Petrovsky are state-owned entities. The third company affected by this leak is Forest, a Russia-based logging firm. Hackers leaked around 37.7 GB worth of information including 375,000 emails of this company.</p> <p><b>Data Available on DDoSecrets</b></p> <p>According to Emma Best, journalist, and co-founder of a non-profit whistleblower organization DDoSecrets Distributed Denial of Secrets, aka DDoSecrets, the enormous data dump is now available on their official website. taken by Anonymous from at least three Russian companies. Anonymous claimed responsibility for the leak in a <a href="#">tweet</a>....</p> <p>DDoSecrets has published more than two million emails since the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began at the end of February 2022.</p> <p><b>Anonymous Vows More Attacks on Russia</b></p> <p>It is no secret that Anonymous is standing strong with Ukraine over the ongoing conflict between the two countries. The collectives have so far targeted both the government and the private sector to spread their message.</p>

The list and timeline of some of the cyberattacks reported by Hackread.com on the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine are as follow:

**Feb 28th:** [Anonymous hacks EV charging station + TV channels](#)

**March 4th:** [Anonymous hacks Russian space research institute website](#)

**March 7th:** [Anonymous hacks Russian TV & streaming sites with war footage](#)

**March 10th:** [Anonymous hacks 90% of misconfigured Russian cloud databases](#)

**March 11th:** [Anonymous Hacks Russian Media Censoring Agency Roskomnadzor](#)

**March 12th:** [Anonymous sent 7M texts and hacked 400 Russian security cameras](#)

**March 15th:** [Anonymous DDoSd Russian Fed Security Service and other websites](#)

**March 19th:** [Anonymous hacked and leaked 79 GB of Russian pipeline giant data](#)

**March 23rd:** [Anonymous hacks printers in Russia to send anti-war messages](#)

**March 29th:** [Anonymous Hacks 2 Russian Industrial Firms, Leaks 112GB of Data](#)

**April 6th:** [Anonymous Breach State-Run Russian Broadcaster; Leak GBs of data](#)

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HEADLINE	04/11 Atlassian: ongoing outage to last longer
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/atlassian-says-ongoing-outage-might-last-two-more-weeks/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/atlassian-says-ongoing-outage-might-last-two-more-weeks/</a>
GIST	<p>Software development and collaboration tool maker Atlassian estimates it might take two more weeks to restore all customer instances impacted by a week-long ongoing outage affecting its cloud services.</p> <p>Seven days later, the company's <a href="#">status page</a> still shows 'Active Incidents' for Jira Software, Jira Work Management, Jira Service Management, Confluence, Opsgenie, Statuspage, and Atlassian Access.</p> <p>While the impact on businesses using its products is undeniable, Atlassian <a href="#">said</a> only around 400 of its more than 200,000 customers are affected.</p> <p>When BleepingComputer first reported on this prolonged outage, Atlassian told us that a routine maintenance script "unintentionally" disabled a small number of sites, blocking customers' access to their products and data.</p> <p>Atlassian initially estimated that its restoration efforts would not take more than several days, confirming to BleepingComputer that the incident was not the result of a cyberattack that would've led to unauthorized access to data.</p> <p>However, in emails sent to affected customers, the company revealed that restoring services to those impacted will likely take up to two more weeks.</p> <p>"We were unable to confirm a more firm ETA until now due to the complexity of the rebuild process for your site. While we are beginning to bring some customers back online, we estimate the rebuilding effort to last for up to 2 more weeks," one customer was <a href="#">told</a>.</p>

	<p>"I know that this is not the news you were hoping for. We apologize for the length and severity of this incident and have taken steps to avoid a recurrence in the future," Atlassian <a href="#">informed</a> another affected client.</p> <p><b>Over 35% of impacted customers brought back online</b></p> <p>The company says it was able to restore functionality for more than 35% of all users directly hit by this ongoing outage with, apparently, no data loss.</p> <p>"A small number of Atlassian customers continue to experience service outages and are unable to access their sites," Atlassian <a href="#">revealed</a> on Monday.</p> <p>"Our global engineering teams are working 24/7 to make progress on this incident. At this time, we have rebuilt functionality for over 35% of the users who are impacted by the service outage, with no reported data loss."</p> <p>This cloud services outage comes after Atlassian's co-founder and co-CEO Scott Farquhar <a href="#">announced</a> in October 2020 that the company will no longer sell licenses for on-premises products starting February 2021 and discontinue support three years later, on February 2, 2024.</p> <p>BleepingComputer has reached out to Atlassian with further questions regarding the incident and will update the story if we receive a response.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Italy luxury fashion house confirms attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/luxury-fashion-house-zegna-confirms-august-ransomware-attack/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/luxury-fashion-house-zegna-confirms-august-ransomware-attack/</a>
GIST	<p>The Italian luxury fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna has confirmed an August 2021 ransomware attack that resulted in an extensive IT systems outage.</p> <p>The disclosure came in today's filing of an SEC Form 424B3 that updates their investment prospectus to alert investors of business disruption and data breach risks resulting from sophisticated cyberattacks.</p> <p>To highlight the potential investment risks, the report provides an example of a ransomware attack that hit the firm in August 2021, impacting most of its IT systems and causing a large-scale interruption.</p> <p>Zegna underlines that they did not engage with the ransomware actors in negotiating a ransom payment, so they had to restore from backups in the weeks that followed the incident.</p> <p>While Zegna had previously <a href="#">disclosed unauthorized access to their systems</a> at the time, it was not until today's SEC filing that they confirmed it was a ransomware attack.</p> <p>"In August 2021, we were subject to a ransomware attack that impacted the majority of our IT systems. As we refused to engage in discussions relating to the payment of the ransom, the responsible parties published certain accounting materials extracted from our IT systems," reads <a href="#">Zegna's SEC filing</a>.</p> <p>"We publicly announced the IT systems breach and gradually restored our IT systems from secure backup servers during the weeks following the breach."</p> <p>As the filing updates the prospectus to address risks to <a href="#">investors</a>, it also warns:</p> <p><i>"A malfunction that results in a wider or sustained disruption to our business could have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations, and financial condition. In addition to supporting our operations, we use our systems to collect and store confidential and sensitive data, including information about our business, our customers and our employees."</i></p>

*Any unauthorized access to our information systems may compromise the privacy of such data and expose us to claims as well as reputational damage. Ultimately, any significant violation of the integrity of our data security could have a material adverse effect on our business, results of operations, and financial condition."*

#### **RansomEXX claimed the attack**

Last year, the RansomEXX operation claimed responsibility for the attack, where data was published as a way to further extort the victim into paying a ransom.

The leaked data was stolen from Zegna's systems and was published by the ransomware gang on the day of the firm's announcement of their attack.

As part of the attack, the threat actors claim to have copied 20.74 GB of data where they offered it in password-protected ZIP files. At this time, Zegna's listing on the leak portal has allegedly received 483,000 visits.

Unfortunately, Zegna's filing confirms the authenticity of the leaked data, but they did not comment on the impact on clients and partners.

This is the same ransomware group that has hit corporate giants such as [Konica Minolta](#) in August 2020, [GIGABYTE](#) in August 2021, and more recently, [Hellmann Worldwide](#).

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Third npm protestware: calls Russia out</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/third-npm-protestware-event-source-polyfill-calls-russia-out/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/third-npm-protestware-event-source-polyfill-calls-russia-out/</a>
GIST	<p>Developers are increasingly voicing their opinions through their open source projects in active use by thousands of software applications and organizations.</p> <p>To do this, a maintainer adds broken code, protest messages, or undesired damaging functionality in the latest versions of their project without documenting it beforehand.</p> <p>When an existing application fetches the latest version of the project, the newly added code gets pulled in and runs by surprise.</p> <p>Most recently, the developer of the 'event-source-polyfill' npm package has peacefully protested Russia's "unreasonable invasion" of Ukraine, to Russian consumers.</p> <p>While for the longest time open source software has been reliable, community-fuelled, and efficient in that it takes out the need to reinvent the wheel, the recurring cases of voluntary self-sabotage by maintainers have cast doubts on the overall reliability of the ecosystem.</p> <p><b>Third 'protestware' of 2022</b></p> <p>On March 17th, Russia-based developer Viktor Mukhachev aka <a href="#">Yaffle</a> added <a href="#">an interesting piece of code</a> to his popular npm library 'event-source-polyfill'.</p> <p><a href="#">Polyfill</a> packages are designed to implement existing JavaScript features on web browsers that may not support them. As such, the package in question expands Mozilla's <a href="#">'EventSource'</a> APIs to other browsers that may lack the concept.</p> <p>And this would explain why the package is used by <a href="#">well over 135,000 GitHub repositories</a> and downloaded over 600,000 times weekly on npm.</p>



However, a change introduced in version 1.0.26 of 'event-source-polyfill', as seen by BleepingComputer, means applications built with the library will show anti-war messages to Russia-based users after 15 seconds of launch.

As of today, the new version [continues to be up on npm](#) and GitHub, nearly four weeks after it went live.

This marks the third major protest of 2022 by an open source developer leveraging his vastly used software to express opinions on a matter of public interest.

In fact around the same time as 'event-source-polyfill' turned into protestware, several other vastly popular packages followed suit.

The ['es5-ext' and 'styled-components'](#) are just some examples of real npm packages with millions of weekly downloads turned protestware, as analyzed by software security company Checkmarx.

In 2016, the 28-year-old Azer Koçulu broke the internet by [withdrawing his popular 'left-pad' library](#) from the npm registry. The far-reaching impact compelled former npm CTO Laurie Voss to [restore the removed versions of left-pad](#).

January's sabotage of ['colors' and 'faker' libraries](#) in protest by their maintainer potentially broke thousands of production applications that were using the dependencies.

Whereas, the outright destructive version of 'node-ipc' released last month by its developer [deleted all data on the hard drive](#) of users it believed were Russian or Belarusian.

The case of 'event-source-polyfill', however, is more benevolent —akin to a peaceful protest.

Rather than deleting any data or breaking applications, the application urges Russia to end its "unreasonable invasion" of Ukraine and prompts Russian civilians to seek reliable news sources.

"The people of Ukraine are universally mobilized and ready to defend their country from the enemy... 91% of Ukrainians fully support their President Volodymyr Zelensky and his response to the Russian attack," writes *Yaffle* within the library.

"The whole world condemned the unreasonable invasion and decided to enter **unprecedented sanctions against Russia**. With each new day, they will be felt more and more strongly among the civilians."

Citing concerns over Russia's control over information that gets disseminated to the civilians, the developer urged users to beware of "one-sided" news and go to reliable sources, giving [BBC's Tor website](#) as an example.

Lastly, after appealing to Russian President Putin to end this "senseless" war, the newly added code directs the user to a [Change.org petition](#) that's been signed by over 1.2 million people to date.

### **Self-sabotage breeds trust issues**

Heroic as these self-sabotage incidents might be for many, for some they cross an ethical line and have posed a new challenge that everyone must now worry about: the trustworthiness and reliability of open source libraries.

In particular, the 'colors' sabotage led to mixed reactions—some praising the maintainer for taking a stance against big corporations who use open source without funding it.

In contrast, the publication of destructive 'node-ipc' versions drew sharp criticism from developers, with some calling it ["a huge damage"](#) to the credibility of the whole open source community.

But, 'event-source-polyfill' may not fall in the same league:

"The popup message is information that there's a war going on, and a suggestion to download the Tor browser (to get past Putin's censorship)," [posted](#) a HackerNews user in reaction to the new 'event-source-polyfill'.

"To some, that's malware, whilst to some people in Russia, it could be valuable information, something helpful."

In the same thread, another reader states, while code changes interfering with the project's intended and expected purposes may be termed as "sabotage," the case of 'event-source-polyfill' doesn't really fit the definition:

"Sabotage, to me, explicitly means that the act was committed with the intent of derailing the project's original purpose. This act seems orthogonal to the original intent of the project, so it's underhanded but it's not really sabotage."

A [debate](#) further ensued on GitHub though, whether certain parts of the newly introduced code could break production apps in edge cases.

As a caution, some have [pinned](#) their 'event-source-polyfill' version to the earlier, safe version 1.0.25.

Alternatively, one can always [clone](#) (fork) trusted versions of an existing open source project and opt to maintain these versions themselves, as opposed to indiscriminately fetching the latest official releases.

### **Redefining open source**

Open source software largely started out as a way to promote an "[open development process](#)," simplify licensing, and better engage with the users and a community of developers who can peer-review and improve software through active participation.

Open source registries like npm, PyPI, and RubyGems are therefore set up in a manner that minimizes barriers to entry. These registries let anyone publish software packages that are ready for consumption by novices and hard-core professionals alike.

While version control platforms like GitHub are traditionally associated with software development and *source code*, cost-free registries like npm simplify the hosting and distribution process for developers looking to ship and use each other's finished apps that run out of the box.

But, as with any system that's open to the public, software repositories can and often face abuse from malicious actors.

Traditional security incidents on npm centered around the distribution of [typosquatted packages](#)—such as an '[electorn](#)' package published by a threat actor to trap developers installing Electron. Should the developer misspell '[electron](#)' in their console, they'd end up with the attacker's malicious package.

In 2021, [dependency confusion](#) drastically gained momentum as an emerging attack vector against software supply chain attacks.

Major incidents also involved accounts of legitimate developers being hijacked by attackers who'd now publish new versions of real libraries laden with malicious code.

Both 2018's '[event-stream](#)' and [ESLint](#) compromises, and this year's cases of '[ua-parser-js](#)', '[coa](#)', and '[rc](#)' being hijacked to serve malware are examples of this problem.

But the recurring incidents of developers voluntarily withdrawing their code from the internet or sabotaging their own projects to accentuate a bigger idea have prompted software consumers to re-evaluate the open source model as it stands today, and engage in a public dialogue that is overdue.

	<p>While current protestware may be centered around the war, that doesn't mean it always will be limited to select trending issues.</p> <p>Developers have discovered an avenue of creative self-expression that no longer restricts them to just delivering <i>expected</i> functionality—a developer can, on a whim, decide to change their mind and their code as they please. A neglected premise of open source is that they always could.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Qbot botnet switches malware delivery</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/qbot-malware-switches-to-new-windows-installer-infection-vector/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/qbot-malware-switches-to-new-windows-installer-infection-vector/</a>
GIST	<p>The Qbot botnet is now pushing malware payloads via phishing emails with password-protected ZIP archive attachments containing malicious MSI Windows Installer packages.</p> <p>This is the first time the Qbot operators are using this tactic, switching from their standard way of delivering the malware via phishing emails dropping Microsoft Office documents with malicious macros on targets' devices.</p> <p>Security researchers suspect this move might be a direct reaction to Microsoft announcing plans to <a href="#">kill malware delivery via VBA Office macros</a> in February after <a href="#">disabling Excel 4.0 (XLM) macros by default</a> in January.</p> <p>Microsoft has begun rolling out the VBA macro autoblock feature to Office for Windows users in early April 2022, starting with Version 2203 in the Current Channel (Preview) and to other release channels and older versions later.</p> <p>"Despite the varying email methods attackers are using to deliver Qakbot, these campaigns have in common their use of malicious macros in Office documents, specifically Excel 4.0 macros," Microsoft <a href="#">said</a> in December.</p> <p>"It should be noted that while threats use Excel 4.0 macros as an attempt to evade detection, this feature is now disabled by default and thus requires users to enable it manually for such threats to execute properly."</p> <p>This is a significant security improvement towards protecting Office customers since using malicious VBA macros embedded in Office documents is a prevalent method to push <a href="#">a large assortment of malware strains</a> in phishing attacks, including <a href="#">Qbot</a>, <a href="#">Emotet</a>, <a href="#">TrickBot</a>, and <a href="#">Dridex</a>.</p> <p><b>What is Qbot?</b>  <a href="#">Qbot</a> (also known as <a href="#">Qakbot</a>, <a href="#">Quakbot</a>, and <a href="#">Pinksliptbot</a>) is a modular Windows banking trojan with worm features used since at least 2007 to steal banking credentials, personal information, and financial data, as well as to drop backdoors on compromised computers and deploy Cobalt Strike beacons.</p> <p>This malware is also known for infecting other devices on a compromised network using network share exploits and <a href="#">highly aggressive brute-force attacks</a> targeting Active Directory admin accounts.</p> <p>Although active for over a decade, the Qbot malware has been primarily used in highly targeted attacks against corporate entities since they provide a higher return on investment.</p> <p>Multiple ransomware gangs, including REvil, Egregor, ProLock, PwndLocker, and MegaCortex, have also used Qbot to breach corporate networks.</p> <p>Since Qbot infections can lead to dangerous infections and highly disruptive attacks, IT admins and security professionals need to become familiar with this malware, the tactics it's using to spread throughout a network, and those used by the botnet operators to deliver it to new targets.</p>

	A Microsoft report from December 2021 captured the <a href="#">versatility of Qbot attacks</a> , making it harder to evaluate the scope of its infections accurately.
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Former DHS acting IT chief convicted</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/former-dhs-acting-it-chief-convicted-in-software-database-theft-scheme">https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/former-dhs-acting-it-chief-convicted-in-software-database-theft-scheme</a>
GIST	<p>The former acting branch chief of the US Department of Homeland Security's Information Technology Division today was convicted on several federal charges related to pilfering government proprietary software and databases.</p> <p>Murali Y. Venkata, 56, of Aldie, Va., was found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the US government, theft of government property, wire fraud, aggravated identity theft, and obstruction. He had worked with two other former government officials — Charles Edwards, former acting inspector general of DHS-OIG, and Sonal Patel, also of DHS-OIG — who pleaded guilty previously in the scheme.</p> <p>The three former DHS officials conspired to steal sensitive, proprietary software from the feds as well as personally identifying information for hundreds of thousands of federal workers, according to <a href="#">a Justice Department press announcement today</a>.</p> <p>Edwards and Patel separately pleaded guilty in 2022 and 2019, respectively, for pilfering US government property in order to create a commercial case management system to sell to government agencies. Venkata stole source code and databases from DHS-OIG and helped Edwards install servers in his home for software developers in India to use to create a commercial version of the stolen software.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 CISA: Russian state hackers exploit bug</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-warns-orgs-of-watchguard-bug-exploited-by-russian-state-hackers/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-warns-orgs-of-watchguard-bug-exploited-by-russian-state-hackers/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has ordered federal civilian agencies and urged all US organizations on Monday to patch an actively exploited bug impacting WatchGuard Firebox and XTM firewall appliances.</p> <p><a href="#">Sandworm</a>, a Russian-sponsored hacking group, believed to be part of the GRU Russian military intelligence agency, also exploited this high severity privilege escalation flaw (<a href="#">CVE-2022-23176</a>) to build a <a href="#">new botnet dubbed Cyclops Blink</a> out of compromised WatchGuard Small Office/Home Office (SOHO) network devices.</p> <p>"WatchGuard Firebox and XTM appliances allow a remote attacker with unprivileged credentials to access the system with a privileged management session via exposed management access," the company explains in a security advisory rating the bug with a critical threat level.</p> <p>The flaw can only be exploited if they are configured to allow unrestricted management access from the Internet. By default, all WatchGuard appliances are configured for restricted management access.</p> <p>Federal Civilian Executive Branch Agencies (FCEB) agencies must secure their systems against these security flaws according to November's <a href="#">binding operational directive (BOD 22-01)</a>.</p> <p>CISA has given them three weeks, until May 2nd, to patch the CVE-2022-23176 flaw added today to its catalog of Known Exploited Vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Even though this directive only applies to federal agencies, CISA also <a href="#">strongly urged</a> all US organizations to prioritize fixing this actively abused security bug to avoid having their WatchGuard appliances compromised.</p>

### Malware hit 1% of WatchGuard firewall appliances

Cyclops Blink, the malware used by the Sandworm state hackers to create their botnet, has been used to target [WatchGuard Firebox firewall appliances](#) with CVE-2022-23176 exploits, as well as [multiple ASUS router models](#), since at least June 2019.

It establishes persistence on the device through firmware updates, and it provides its operators with remote access to compromised networks.

It uses the infected devices' legitimate firmware update channels to maintain access to the compromised devices by injecting malicious code and deploying repacked firmware images.

This malware is also modular, making it simple to upgrade and target new devices and security vulnerabilities, tapping into new pools of exploitable hardware.

WatchGuard issued [its own advisory](#) after US and UK cybersecurity and law enforcement agencies linked the malware to the GRU hackers, saying that Cyclops Blink may have hit roughly 1% of all active WatchGuard firewall appliances.

The UK NCSC, FBI, CISA, and NSA joint advisory says organizations should assume all accounts on infected devices as being compromised. Admins should also immediately remove Internet access to the management interface.

### Botnet disrupted, malware removed from C2 servers

On Wednesday, US government officials announced the disruption of the Cyclops Blink botnet before being weaponized and used in attacks.

The FBI also removed the malware from Watchguard devices identified as being used as command and control servers, notifying owners of compromised devices in the United States and abroad before cleaning the Cyclops Blink infection.

"I should caution that as we move forward, any Firebox devices that acted as bots, may still remain vulnerable in the future until mitigated by their owners," FBI Director Chris Wray warned.

"So those owners should still go ahead and adopt Watchguard's detection and remediation steps as soon as possible."

WatchGuard has [shared instructions](#) on restoring infected Firebox appliances to a clean state and updating them to the latest Fireware OS version to prevent future infections.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Senior EU officials targeted by spyware</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/technology/exclusive-senior-eu-officials-were-targeted-with-israeli-spyware-sources-2022-04-11/?&amp;web_view=true">https://www.reuters.com/technology/exclusive-senior-eu-officials-were-targeted-with-israeli-spyware-sources-2022-04-11/?&amp;web_view=true</a>
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS/WASHINGTON - April 11 (Reuters) - Senior officials at the European Commission were targeted last year with spy software designed by an Israeli surveillance firm, according to two EU officials and documentation reviewed by Reuters.</p> <p>Among them was Didier Reynders, a senior Belgian statesman who has served as the European Justice Commissioner since 2019, according to one of the documents. At least four other commission staffers were also targeted, according to the document and another person familiar with the matter. The two EU officials confirmed that staffers at the commission had been targeted but did not provide details.</p> <p>The commission became aware of the targeting following messages issued by Apple to thousands of iPhone owners in November telling them they were "targeted by state-sponsored attackers," the two EU</p>

officials said. It was the first time Apple had sent a mass alert to users that they were in government hackers' crosshairs.

The warnings triggered immediate concern at the commission, the two officials said. In a Nov. 26 email reviewed by Reuters, a senior tech staffer sent a message to colleagues with background about Israeli hacking tools and a request to be on the lookout for additional warnings from Apple.

"Given the nature of your responsibilities, you are a potential target," the staffer said in the email, reviewed by Reuters.

Reuters was unable to determine who used the Israeli spyware to target Reynders and his Brussels-based colleagues, whether the attempts were successful, and, if so, what the hackers might have obtained as a result.

Reynders and his spokesman David Marechal did not return repeated messages. European Commission spokesman Johannes Bahrke declined comment. Apple declined comment.

Security researchers have said the recipients of the warnings were targeted between February and September 2021 using ForcedEntry, an advanced piece of software that was used by Israeli cyber surveillance vendor NSO Group to help foreign spy agencies remotely and invisibly take control of iPhones. A smaller Israeli spyware vendor named QuaDream also sold a nearly identical tool to government clients, Reuters previously reported.

NSO said in a statement that it was not responsible for the hacking attempts, saying the targeting described by Reuters "could not have happened with NSO's tools."

The company, which faces a number of overlapping lawsuits and was recently blacklisted by U.S. officials over alleged human rights abuses, said it supported an investigation into the targeting and called for the establishment of global rules to govern the spyware industry.

QuaDream, which keeps a lower profile, did not return repeated messages.

IT experts examined at least some of the officials' smartphones for signs of compromise but the results were inconclusive, according to the two EU sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak to the press.

Reuters has not been able to determine whether the commission is still investigating the matter.

News of the targeting comes as the European Union is beginning to follow the United States in taking a harder look at spyware merchants like NSO.

The European Parliament is set to launch a committee of inquiry to investigate the use of surveillance software in European member states on April 19, according to Sophie in 't Veld, the EU lawmaker who championed the committee's creation.

In 't Veld told Reuters she had been unaware that European Commission officials were targeted, calling the news "dynamite."

"We really have to get to the bottom of this," she said.

The committee was formed in the wake of reports that senior opposition politicians in Poland had their phones hacked with Israeli spyware and that prominent critics and investigative journalists in Hungary had also been targeted.



	<p>Polish officials and a Hungarian ruling party lawmaker have acknowledged that their respective governments purchased NSO software, although both nations have denied wrongdoing in relation to allegations of domestic espionage.</p> <p>It was important not to jump to conclusions about who might be responsible, said Kenneth Lasoen, a research fellow at the Clingendael Netherlands Institute of International Relations.</p> <p>The EU “are a very high profile target for multiple actors,” Lasoen said. “Brussels is a true nest of espionage.”</p>
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HEADLINE	04/11 Tricky aftermath of source code leaks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/source-code-leak-dangers/">https://www.wired.com/story/source-code-leak-dangers/</a>
GIST	<p><b>THE LAPSUS\$ DIGITAL <a href="#">extortion group</a></b> is the latest to mount a high-profile data-stealing rampage against major tech companies. And among other things, the group is known for grabbing and leaking source code at every opportunity, including from Samsung, Qualcomm, and Nvidia. At the end of March, alongside revelations that they had <a href="#">breached an Okta subprocessor</a>, the hackers also dropped a trove of data containing portions of the source code for Microsoft's Bing, Bing Maps, and its Cortana virtual assistant. Sounds bad, right?</p> <p>Businesses, governments, and other institutions have been plagued by ransomware attacks, business email compromise, and an array other breaches in recent years. Researchers say, though, that while source code leaks may seem catastrophic, and certainly aren't <i>good</i>, they typically aren't the worst-case scenario of a criminal data breach.</p> <p>“Some source code does represent trade secrets, some parts of source code may make it easier for people to abuse systems, but accounts and user data are typically the biggest things companies have to protect,” says Shane Huntley, director of Google's Threat Analysis Group. “For a vulnerability hunter, it makes certain things easier, allowing them to skip a lot of steps. But it’s not magic. Just because someone can see the source code doesn't mean they'll be able to exploit it right then.”</p> <p>In other words, when attackers gain access to source code—and especially when they leak it for all to see—a company's intellectual property could be exposed in the process, and attackers may be able to spot vulnerabilities in their systems more quickly. But source code alone isn't a road map to find exploitable bugs. Attackers can't take over Cortana from Microsoft or access users' accounts simply because they have some of the source code for the platform. In fact, as open source software shows, it's possible for source code to be publicly available without making the software it underpins less secure.</p> <p>Google's Huntley points out that the same broad and diverse vetting needed to secure open source software is also vital for critical proprietary source code, just in case it is ever stolen or leaks. And he also notes that major vulnerabilities in open source software, like the recent <a href="#">Log4j flaws</a>, have often lurked undiscovered for years or even decades, similar to inconspicuous typos that aren't caught by an author, editor, or copyeditor.</p> <p>Microsoft <a href="#">detailed</a> its Lapsus\$ breach on March 22 and said in a statement that “Microsoft does not rely on the secrecy of code as a security measure and viewing source code does not lead to elevation of risk.”</p> <p>Typically, security researchers and attackers alike must use “reverse engineering” to find exploitable vulnerabilities in software, working backward from the final product to understand its components and how it works. And researchers say that process can actually be more helpful than looking at source code for finding bugs, because it involves more creative and open-ended analysis than just looking at a recipe. Still, there's no doubt that source code leaks can be problematic, especially for organizations that haven't done enough auditing and vetting to be sure that they've caught most basic bugs.</p>

Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the antivirus company Emsisoft, also points out that attackers have a clear interest in making source code leaks sound as damaging as possible, regardless of the reality for a particular organization.

“Attackers want to make the incident seem as bad as they possibly can, and that isn’t simply to extract payment from the current victim,” Callow says. “It’s also sending a warning shot to their future victims saying, ‘Look how much attention these incidents can bring; we make your life thoroughly miserable. The easiest and least painful option is simply to pay us!’”

In practice, though, Callow says that while some data breach victims have specific concerns about source code leaks, they aren't the highest-priority concern for most organizations. “It isn’t to say it can never be problematic, just that it usually isn’t,” he says.

The bigger concern about source code leaks often isn't about the source code itself. Rather, if an attacker has compromised something as highly guarded as source code, it could mean that they've grabbed other crown jewels like sensitive user data, encryption keys, or code-signing certificates, which are meant to verify that a piece of software hasn't been altered by a malicious actor. If stolen, these have more urgent and immediate ramifications for the security of a company, its products, and, most importantly, its customers.

Most dangerous of all, if an attacker can not just access or steal a copy, but *change* a product's source code through a software update or other manipulation, that's the type of breach that can have [dire consequences](#).

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Extradited: sold backdoor phones for FBI</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7nvy8/us-extradites-anom-an0m-phone-seller-ayub">https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7nvy8/us-extradites-anom-an0m-phone-seller-ayub</a>
GIST	<p>The United States has extradited a man it accuses of working for Anom, a company that sold encrypted phones to criminals but which was secretly backdoored by the FBI to spy on the communications of organized crime around the globe. Aurangzeb Ayub quietly arrived in the U.S. last month, according to court records reviewed by Motherboard.</p> <p>Ayub is the <a href="#">first of 17 alleged Anom workers</a> to be extradited since <a href="#">Motherboard reported on the operation</a>, known as Trojan Shield, and the FBI and its law enforcement partners held press conferences on its success in June. While authorities have arrested and prosecuted users of the Anom devices, Ayub’s extradition is some judicial movement regarding those who allegedly sold phones for Anom, some of whom the U.S. Department of Justice has also charged.</p> <p>“Ayub is charged with 16 other co-defendants; he is the first defendant to appear on the Indictment and was extradited from the Netherlands to the United States,” a court document filed on Tuesday reads. He first appeared in the Southern District of California on March 21, the document adds.</p> <p>The Department of Justice and Ayub’s defense team have already discussed the production of discovery, which includes all of Ayub’s communications on the Anom platform, according to court records. That material contains around 3,500 communications and about 14GB of data, the court records add. By last Friday, the government was expected to turn over these messages to Ayub’s defense team, the document reads.</p> <p>The court record adds that the Department of Justice anticipates that it will turn over more material in May, which will contain recorded conversations between an FBI confidential human source (CHS) and Ayub, a technical report about the Anom platform, and other reports.</p> <p>Operation Trojan Shield, and its Australian counterpart called Operation Ironside, started in 2018 when a former seller of phones from other companies <a href="#">called Phantom Secure and Sky</a> became a CHS and offered the FBI their own company they were developing to aid in the FBI’s investigations. That company was Anom. Typically, companies in this industry sell phones that may have the GPS, voice call, and other</p>

	<p>capabilities removed, and instead just send end-to-end encrypted messages. Some deliberately cater to the criminal underground, and <a href="#">some are even run by organized crime figures themselves</a>.</p> <p>In close coordination with the authorities, that CHS secretly <a href="#">added a feature to Anom's devices</a> that made a copy of every message sent across the platform and automatically provided that copy to law enforcement agencies. In all, the FBI intercepted 27 million messages sent across Anom. <a href="#">As Motherboard previously reported</a>, the Anom phones also secretly captured their GPS coordinates and provided these to law enforcement as well.</p> <p>Anom, like other encrypted phone companies before it, used a network of distributors to sell these devices to criminal end users. Unbeknownst to them, these sellers were really in effect working for the FBI, and helped to spread a backdoored device to criminal organizations around the planet. Ayub is allegedly one of these distributors, with <a href="#">the indictment against him and others</a> describing Ayub as “a citizen of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands who currently resides in the Netherlands. Ayub is a distributor of the Anom network to criminal end-users.”</p> <p>Ayub is charged under RICO, a law traditionally used to prosecute mob bosses. Since 2018 when the FBI started shutting down encrypted phone companies initially with Phantom Secure, the Department of Justice has leveled similar charges against the administrators and sellers for such companies.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Archiving social posts Russia war crimes</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/open-source-russia-war-crimes-ukraine/">https://www.wired.com/story/open-source-russia-war-crimes-ukraine/</a>
GIST	<p>IN EARLY APRIL, as Ukraine started to regain control of Bucha and other small towns northwest of Kyiv, appalling imagery began to spread on Telegram and other social networks. Photos and videos showed bodies in the streets and anguished survivors describing loved ones, civilians, killed by Russian soldiers. In Chernivtsi, in western Ukraine, attorney Denys Rabomizo carefully built an archive of the gruesome evidence. His aim: to preserve social media posts that could help prove Russian war crimes.</p> <p>“Psychologically it’s very difficult to look at,” says Rabomizo, who coordinates a team of more than 50 volunteers who gather online material and also contact witnesses to alleged atrocities to gather testimony. “So I think about trying to archive all this in a proper way to be used in the future.”</p> <p>Such evidence could, in the months and years ahead, be submitted to the International Criminal Court in the Netherlands, which said in February it would begin investigating alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. Cases over actions in Ukraine might also be brought at the European Court of Human Rights or in countries like Germany that prosecute certain crimes beyond their borders.</p> <p>“Capturing social media from Ukraine is an incredible source of evidence,” says Alex Whiting, deputy prosecutor at the Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor’s Office in the Hague, and a visiting professor at Harvard University. A deluge of TikTok and Telegram posts could vastly increase the amount of evidence of alleged Russian war crimes—but they will only aid prosecutions if judges accept such material in court.</p> <p>War crime cases are usually built with witness testimony, documents, and conventional forensic evidence, but all are hard to collect after the chaos of war. Open source investigation methods that combine clues across social posts and other sources could fill crucial gaps, says Whiting. But they have rarely featured in such cases to date, and material posted by persons unknown has been seen as unreliable and at risk of manipulation.</p> <p>Rabomizo and others working on the conflict in Ukraine, including open source investigators at Bellingcat, believe they can change that with new, more rigorous protocols and technology for archiving posts. “Ukraine will probably be the first time open source evidence will be tested extensively in court,” says Nadia Volkova, director of the Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group. She’s been helping Rabomizo and others document potential war crimes through an alliance of Ukrainian human rights organizations called the 5AM Coalition, named for the moment on February 24 that the first explosions rocked Kyiv.</p>

Although open source evidence has not been well tested as evidence of war crimes, there are signs that the idea is becoming more mainstream. In December, the United Nations Human Rights Office and lawyers at UC Berkeley released legal guidelines, called the Berkeley Protocol, for gathering, verifying, and using open source and social media evidence of human rights violations. Volkova has been following the protocol, and Berkeley's Human Rights Center has been advising her and others in Ukraine.

Collecting online evidence so that it can meet the standards of a criminal court requires painstaking work. Links logged by Rabomizo and volunteers working with him are fed to a nonprofit called Mnemonic, which has created software that downloads social posts from different platforms and generates a cryptographic hash to show the material has not been altered. It saves the posts into a digital archive that will be made available to investigators. Mnemonic operates similar collections for conflicts in Yemen, Syria, and Sudan. Its material has contributed to criminal complaints filed in Germany and Sweden against Syria's use of chemical weapons, but the cases have not reached court.

This is not the first time Ukraine has become a testing ground for the use of online posts as evidence of military crimes. Bellingcat, which has pioneered and popularized the public use of open source intelligence, or OSINT, won prominence through its investigation into Malaysia Airlines flight 17, from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, which was downed over Ukraine in 2014.

In 2015 Bellingcat concluded that a Russian army missile had shot down the aircraft, in part by analyzing photos posted online that showed a missile launcher moving through a part of eastern Ukraine controlled by pro-Russian separatists and losing one missile along the way. An investigation led by the Netherlands later independently came to the same conclusion.

Several years later, Bellingcat investigators got talking with lawyers at the nonprofit Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) about how gaps in evidence of civilian deaths in Yemen from airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition were a barrier to filing legal cases. The two organizations have since used open source video to contribute to a case being built under UK law against arms suppliers whose products were used in the attacks. GLAN and Bellingcat are also jointly developing a more rigorous methodology for collecting online videos and other material used in investigations. The protocol is still a work in progress, but it will be used on material from Ukraine judged to show potential crimes. Bellingcat plans to publish the methodology once it is finalized.

That protocol requires investigators to use a clean and unused computer login and web browser clear of cookies and to take careful notes of every step taken, such as which search terms they enter and why. Software called Hunchly, primarily marketed to law enforcement, also records an investigator's every action. It captures each page a person views, time-stamps it, and stores a cryptographic hash. "It's slightly more onerous than a usual investigation, but we're trying to get to the point where you could put our evidence in front of a judge who hasn't heard of OSINT and has never been on Twitter," says Nick Waters, a Bellingcat investigator working with GLAN. "I want to use this information to hold people to account for their actions."

Last year, Waters and Bellingcat founder Eliot Higgins took part in a mock trial jointly organized with GLAN in which opposing barristers sparred over the reliability of material gathered by the group before a British judge—who now serves on the International Criminal Court. The judge ultimately decided that open source evidence was valid.

Bellingcat is also feeding links of posts from Ukraine that merit further investigation to Mnemonic for archiving. That has helped the nonprofit to pull in several hundred thousand items since it began operating in March. Mnemonic has also developed tools to help researchers search and verify open source information as they build cases around specific incidents. Hadi al Khatib, Mnemonic's executive director, says the volume of material from Ukraine is much greater than from any conflict he's seen before, with the amount of material posted on TikTok and Telegram more prominent than in previous conflicts documented by open source investigators.

One thing that isn't new about working on the war in Ukraine is that social platforms often pull down posts of interest to investigators for breaching policies on depictions of violence. Valuable evidence that isn't collected in time by Mnemonic or others using rigorous methods can be effectively lost forever, says al Khatib. "I don't see why social media companies don't build tools to facilitate the human rights community in what we're doing," he says.

Twitter spokesperson Elizabeth Busby did not comment on whether the company specifically supports open source investigators but said all researchers can use the company's "uniquely open" API to access public tweets. TikTok did not return a request for comment; Meta spokesperson Drew Pusateri declined to comment.

Even without help from social platforms, investigators will have a potentially overwhelming supply of material to sift through. The ICC's prosecutor last month asked for new funding for technology to help his office handle video and other digital evidence. Despite new archiving protocols, the sifting required could become a sticking point in court. "The defense is going to be concerned that the information is cherry-picked and that potentially exculpatory information was left out," says Whiting, the deputy prosecutor for Kosovo.

Al Khatib and others working on gathering evidence of potential Russian war crimes in Ukraine remain optimistic that the firehose of tweets, TikToks, and Telegram posts can bring greater accountability than in previous conflicts. "If it does start to become recognized as a standard, then you have a much bigger pool to draw from, says Dearbhla Minogue, a legal officer at GLAN. "And it will greatly increase the chances of any given atrocity being prosecuted."

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Study: WA 5<sup>th</sup> most 'catfished' state 2021</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/study-shows-washington-is-fifth-most-catfished-state-2021/QKTTY5BRMVGZ5GS6RAEDBYI3SE/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/study-shows-washington-is-fifth-most-catfished-state-2021/QKTTY5BRMVGZ5GS6RAEDBYI3SE/</a>
GIST	<p>A new study shows Washington is the fifth most catfished state in the U.S., with 657 victims losing a record \$32 million in 2021, up from \$15 million in 2020, according to Social Catfish, an online dating investigation service based in California.</p> <p>Despite widespread warnings and shows like "Tinder Swindler" on Netflix raising public awareness, romance scams have become the most common type of fraud recorded by the Federal Trade Commission, with victims losing \$1.5 billion in the last five years, according to the study.</p> <p><a href="#">SocialCatfish.com</a> released a study on the <a href="#">Most Catfished States in 2021</a> on Thursday, using FBI and FTC data released in March and February 2022.</p> <p>The study shows the average victim in Washington lost \$48,644 last year.</p> <p>The top four states whose residents lost the most to catfishing scams, with Washington coming in at #5, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• California, with \$184 million stolen.</li><li>• Florida, with \$70 million stolen.</li><li>• Texas, with \$65 million stolen.</li><li>• New York, with \$58 million stolen.</li></ul> <p>The bottom five places in the U.S. are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arkansas, with \$1.2 million stolen.</li><li>• New Hampshire, with \$1 million stolen.</li><li>• District of Columbia, with \$861,723 stolen.</li><li>• Vermont, with \$528,709 stolen.</li><li>• Maine, with \$386,894 stolen.</li></ul>

	<p>The study said that among romance scammers' new tactics are money laundering and cryptocurrency investments.</p> <p>Social Catfish said there are five new romance scams in 2022 including:</p> <p><b>Money mules:</b> Victims are tricked into money laundering when the scammer says they need to wire money overseas to a family member in trouble, but there is an issue with their bank.</p> <p><b>CryptoRom:</b> Scammers convince the victim to invest in a bogus cryptocurrency app.</p> <p><b>Teens targeted on TikTok:</b> Though teens may be tech-savvy, young people are not always savvy in love. Social Catfish says teens lost a record \$101 million to romance scams in 2021.</p> <p><b>Social media influencers:</b> Scammers impersonate a successful influencer and engage in romance scams.</p> <p><b>Gift card scams:</b> It's a standard romance scam but instead of asking for money, which could be traced to a bank account, they ask for gift cards, which cannot be traced.</p> <p>For more information on these scams and how to avoid them, visit <a href="https://socialcatfish.com">SocialCatfish.com</a>.</p>
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## Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Nigeria secret terrorism trials raise worries</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nigerias-secret-terrorism-trials-raise-human-rights-worries-84014609">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/nigerias-secret-terrorism-trials-raise-human-rights-worries-84014609</a>
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Nigeria -- Nigeria's decision to conduct the trials of suspects charged with terrorism behind closed doors has been criticized by human rights advocates.</p> <p>The West African nation last week began implementing a new court practice that bans the media and the public from trials involving terrorism charges at the start of the trial of a pro-Biafra separatist leader.</p> <p>Nnamdi Kanu, who holds dual Nigerian and British citizenship, leads the Indigenous People of Biafra campaigning for the secession from Nigeria of the Igbo, Nigeria's third-largest ethnic group.</p> <p>Kanu's trial in the capital, Abuja, resumed behind closed doors a day after the nation's Federal High Court announced that court proceedings for offences of terrorism "shall be held in camera," prompting concern among many human rights advocates.</p> <p>"We are concerned that this breaches the constitution," Anietie Ewang, Nigeria Researcher in the Africa division of Human Rights Watch told The Associated Press of the secret court trials.</p> <p>If Nigerian authorities fear that confidential security information could be made public in a terrorism trial, those concerns should be examined "on a case-by-case basis," Ewang said, "as opposed to giving out a blanket ban that would clearly restrict public scrutiny."</p> <p>Kanu is accused of leading terrorism-related activities and instigating violence in Nigeria's southeast, including a jailbreak in Imo state last year that led to the escape of nearly 2,000 inmates. He denies the seven charges including terrorism and felony. Eight other charges were dropped by the court when the trial resumed last week.</p> <p>The proceedings against Kanu "should be a public trial that the whole world can watch," his lawyer Mike Ozekhome said, likening the secret court sitting to "a gathering of witches and wizards in a coven."</p>



	<p>The concerns are not just about Kanu's trial, say the activists as Nigeria has dozens of terrorism suspects in detention, many who have been held for years.</p> <p>“The right to a public hearing safeguards the fairness and independence of the judicial process and helps to maintain public confidence in the judicial system,” Amnesty International Nigeria office told The Associated Press.</p> <p>Except when a secret trial is meant to protect the interest of a child, “court hearings and judgements must be public,” said Seun Bakare, head of programs at Amnesty Nigeria.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 ISIS calls for ‘social media warfare’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-calls-for-social-media-warfare-to-counter-enchanted-influencers-and-incite/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-calls-for-social-media-warfare-to-counter-enchanted-influencers-and-incite/</a>
GIST	<p>A concerted focus on “social media warfare” is critical to advance on the ideological battlefield but also in order to counter the pull of “enchanted” social media influencers, ISIS Khorasan declared in a new issue of the group’s English-language magazine.</p> <p>“War comes in many form and targets different aspects of humans. A war can be fought militarily targeting physical self or it can be fought ideologically targeting intellect,” said an article in the third issue of <i>Voice of Khurasan</i> magazine released online. “As much importance the physical clashes hold ideological confrontations also matter if not more. The physical battle can be lost even before it starts if people, in our case Muslims, are defeated or at the least trapped in the battle for the hearts and minds.”</p> <p>“The Crusaders of the West understood the importance of battle for the hearts and minds, and hasten to prepare to advance for confrontation in this front by opening their research centres, colleges and other forms of institutions. They funded thousands of people in the name of research for this along and bought people who wear cloaks of Muslim,” the article continued. “Think-tanks such as ‘RAND Corporation’ has wrote about these in more than a decade ago by outlining a framework that Crusader America should follow, which groups they should target to work hand in hand towards this intellectual Crusade.”</p> <p>ISIS said that the goal of the West’s “ideological battle is to try and counter the true Islamic ideology which Crusaders claim as ‘radical and dogmatic interpretations of Islam’, and make sons of Islam follow the wishy-washy version of Islam that is against jihad, full implementation of Shari’ah and its religious punishments.”</p> <p>“Jihad against the crusaders and their allies is the best way to deter them. Jihad is not limited to fighting physically, and fighting with tongues are as important as fighting physically,” ISIS-K said. “In this age, social media warfare holds the utmost importance as the medias and social media personalities are enchanting the eyes of the people. Fighting in this field needs to be done in order to incite the believers and save other Muslims from the negative impact of the enchanting battle for hearts and minds.”</p> <p><i>Voice of Khurasan</i> has so far been on a monthly schedule, with the 37-page inaugural issue released in February, a 35-page issue released in March and the current April issue coming in at 20 pages long.</p> <p>In the <a href="#">first issue</a>, the group declared that theirs is the “most important province” of ISIS after Iraq and Syria. The magazine furthered the long-running ISIS narrative that the loss of the group’s claimed caliphate in Iraq and Syria is “temporary,” adding that “although we lost the Khilafah territory and thousands of Mujahideen were martyred in a period of 5 years, there is no problem.”</p> <p>ISIS told the Taliban in the article that they will “become our brother” if they “desist from your deeds, declare yourself free from infidel democratic system, free your necks from slavery of infidels and ISI, repent from infidel beliefs, innovations and other superstitions,” release prisoners and “acknowledge the sovereignty of one God alone.”</p>

	<p>The magazine declared that “even though our territories have been taken away from us” ISIS is still “engaged” in jihad as “we are East Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Libya, Sinai and other countries including the Philippines are moving very fast and our numbers and strength are increasing day by day.”</p> <p>The second issue similarly dedicated ample space to criticizing the Taliban and argued that “to this day no entity, no person has ever ... brought forth a legit argument against the beliefs of the Khalifah” while slamming the “sheer stupidity” of al-Qaeda leadership. The magazine also brought up the Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham merger in Syria and a frequent target of ISIS ire, HTS leader Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, saying that he has “cut off his group from al-Qaeda, rebranded his group like he changes underpants in an attempt to escape from terrorism label.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Ex-IS fighter testifies against Beatles guard</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/ex-islamic-state-fighter-testifies-against-alleged-beatles-guard-11649706072?mod=hp_listb_pos5">https://www.wsj.com/articles/ex-islamic-state-fighter-testifies-against-alleged-beatles-guard-11649706072?mod=hp_listb_pos5</a>
GIST	<p>ALEXANDRIA, Va.—An American former member of Islamic State testified Monday that El Shafee Elsheikh, accused of being part of a brutal cell that murdered U.S. citizens, held a senior role within the terrorist organization, carrying a Glock pistol that the witness described as “a symbol of ISIS aristocracy.”</p> <p>Prosecutors called Omer Kuzu, 26 years old, who in 2020 <a href="#">pleaded guilty in an unrelated terrorism case</a> in Texas, as they build a case that Mr. Elsheikh, who was born in 1988 in Sudan and grew up in London, was a member of a group of apparently British guards who oversaw foreigners taken hostage in Syria and were responsible for killing four Americans among them.</p> <p>“He was quiet, reserved, almost secretive,” testified Mr. Kuzu, who said he first met Mr. Elsheikh, dressed in green military garb, in Raqqa, Syria, in 2015. “That told me that he was not an ordinary member. He seemed to be more important.”</p> <p>Mr. Elsheikh also spoke with a British accent, Mr. Kuzu said.</p> <p>Mr. Elsheikh <a href="#">faces charges of hostage-taking resulting in death</a> and other counts stemming from the torture and killings of humanitarian aid worker Kayla Mueller, journalist James Foley and others in Syria in 2014 and early 2015. Prosecutors said he was among a group of British guards known to the foreign prisoners as the “Beatles,” feared for their wanton cruelty, which included vicious beatings that often left hostages with broken ribs.</p> <p>The government is relying on the emotional testimony of several released hostages who interacted with the guards but never looked at them directly. Mr. Kuzu said Mr. Elsheikh never talked to him about kidnapping or executing them.</p> <p>A defense attorney suggested Mr. Kuzu had limited knowledge of Mr. Elsheikh and was testifying so prosecutors would seek a lower sentence in his own terrorism case.</p> <p>Mr. Kuzu said he saw Mr. Elsheikh again several more times, including on a battlefield in 2017, where he was with another tall, British man who had an M4 assault rifle and “an air of importance.”</p> <p>“They seemed to be a duo or something, sort of a tag-team,” Mr. Kuzu said under questioning by First Assistant U.S. Attorney Raj Parekh.</p> <p>Mr. Kuzu later in his testimony identified the tall man as the same person who <a href="#">appeared alongside Mr. Elsheikh in a CNN interview</a>: Alexandra Kotey, another London-raised ISIS prison guard. Kotey pleaded guilty last year to working with Mr. Elsheikh and others to take Ms. Mueller hostage, <a href="#">along with Mr. Foley</a>, journalist Steven Sotloff and aid worker Peter Kassig, who were all beheaded in</p>

gruesome propaganda videos. Prosecutors aren't expected to seek testimony from Kotey, who is expected to be sentenced in the coming months.

Mr. Elsheikh and Kotey were captured by Kurdish fighters in Syria in 2018 and [were in U.S. military custody](#) in Iraq until 2020, when they [were brought to the U.S. to face the charges](#). The Justice Department agreed not to pursue the death penalty against them, paving the way for the British government to provide evidence for their prosecution in the U.S., on an eight-count indictment that charged them with hostage-taking resulting in death, conspiring to murder Americans outside the U.S., and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists.

Mr. Elsheikh's two-week trial has been dominated by stirring testimony from former hostages who had been released.

On Monday, French journalist Didier François described how he and photojournalist Edouard Elias had been kidnapped after entering Syria in 2013, and were held at an Islamic State facility where other prisoners were being tortured. Mr. François, who was transferred to a number of prisons before his release in April 2014, said he became familiar with the Beatles and the fear and pain they would inflict, even though they covered their faces, adding he often couldn't tell them apart.

"They were always together, always very violent and very sadistic," Mr. François said. "It didn't make much difference which one was beating us up."

Mr. François said the Beatles guards were instrumental in crafting proof-of-life videos of the hostages for use in ransom negotiations.

Mr. Elias testified on Friday that he heard people being beaten in a corridor of the prison where he was first taken hostage and knives being used. "You hear the beatings and the worst thing is you stop hearing the yelling because they are dead," said Mr. Elias, stopping to wipe tears from his eyes.

He said he heard people being slaughtered, and described the sound that came after a beheading. "It was like water," Mr. Elias said.

Mr. Elias said he was later placed with other American and British hostages who spoke of being terrorized by three English-speaking guards who came to be known among the prisoners as the "Beatles," with a reputation for beating any prisoners who looked at them despite keeping their faces covered.

When Mr. Elias first encountered those guards, he said he was surprised at how different they were from the local guards, who usually wore flip flops and carried sticks. The English-speaking guards had professional military gear, boots, and Glock pistols, working together as a team, he said. One of them came to Mr. Elias and asked him about the conditions of his captivity. "I told him we were starving and had lice," Mr. Elias said, adding that the guard punched him and said it was a "sexual disease."

After the guards left, one of Mr. Elias's fellow prisoners, Federico Motka, was so shaken by past memories of them that he was unable to speak for 10 minutes, Mr. Elias said. After that, he said, his fellow prisoners told him: " 'These are the guards who tortured us...these are the Beatles.' "

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Guilty: murdering UK MP in terror attack</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/11/david-amess-verdict-terrorist-attack-ali-harbi-ali-guilty">https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/apr/11/david-amess-verdict-terrorist-attack-ali-harbi-ali-guilty</a>
GIST	<p>A man cleared of being a terrorist threat by an official anti-radicalisation programme may spend the rest of his life in jail for the assassination of the Conservative MP Sir David Amess.</p> <p>Ali Harbi Ali, 26, stabbed Amess to death on 15 October 2021, fuelled by Islamic State propaganda and having spent at least two years researching which MP to murder.</p>

Ali was being radicalised in 2014 at the same time as he was going through the Prevent anti-radicalisation scheme. The Guardian understands that in 2015, while Ali was becoming an adherent of terrorist violence, Prevent concluded he did not pose a significant danger and his case was closed.

Amess died barely an hour after the attack at a church in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, where he had been holding an advice surgery for those from his Southend West constituency. He was the second MP in just over five years to be murdered by a terrorist; in 2016, an extreme rightwing attacker assassinated the Labour MP Jo Cox.

Her widow, Brendan Cox, said after Ali's conviction: "The terrorist will rot in jail and die in ignominy. David's name will be remembered, especially by the people of Southend whom he served.

"Terrorists may cite different ideologies, but what unites them is their desire for infamy, their cowardly attacks on the unarmed and the total failure to advance their cause. All of my thoughts and love are with David's family today."

Ali, who had once dreamed of being a doctor, was arrested at the scene, having posed as a constituent to gain an appointment. He told police after his arrest that he supported IS and that he had picked Amess, whose constituency surgery details, including location and time were advertised online.

Amess, 69, was stabbed 21 times and died in the church before paramedics could get him to hospital.

After 18 minutes of deliberation, the jury at the Old Bailey in central London convicted Ali of the murder of Amess and planning other attacks against MPs. He refused to stand as the unanimous verdicts were delivered.

Ali, from Kentish Town, north London, took a train to Essex and booked an appointment at the constituency surgery with the sole aim of killing Amess. He lied to Amess's aides that he had recently moved to Essex.

Once in the room with Amess, Ali received a call, said sorry, stood up and pulled a knife from his pocket and began a frenzied knife attack.

As Amess lay dying, Ali sent a note from his phone apparently justifying his actions to his WhatsApp contacts and stayed in the church. He did not try to attack anyone else, despite ample time and opportunity.

A man who entered the church just after the stabbing saw Ali standing and holding a knife in his right hand, saying: "I want to kill David. I want them all to die."

Ali was on the phone and the witness could hear a female voice saying, "What have you done?" to which Ali replied that he had done it because of Syria and that he wanted to be shot and killed.

The man asked Ali why he had done it and he replied: "I wanted to kill David and every MP who voted for bombings in Syria. I wanted to die, be shot and be a hero."

After his arrest Ali told police he had wanted officers to shoot him and had rushed towards them. Instead, once he realised that the first officers on the scene were unarmed, he had heeded their command to drop his knife.

He had planned an attack for two years, since May 2019, supposedly angered by western actions in Syria. He had carried out reconnaissance on other MPs, even scouting the home of Michael Gove.

He loitered around the Houses of Parliament on several occasions, looking for a chance to strike. Counter-terrorism officials believe he acted alone.

Ali had visited the north London constituency office of Mike Freer MP and had been spotted peering in through a window. Searches of his electronic devices showed research on MPs including Dominic Raab; the Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer; and Ben Wallace.

Amess's killing caused shock and outrage as well as a review of MPs' security. He was known as a diligent constituency MP with 38 years in parliament. The jury was told the murder was "an attack on democracy".

The issue of whether the level of danger Ali posed was properly assessed may be an issue for the inquest into Amess's death, expected at a future date. Once Ali was referred to Prevent, he was assessed as being of sufficient concern that he was seen by the Channel programme – reserved for those at greatest risk of radicalisation.

Police and security sources have given little detail about his Prevent involvement, which was first revealed by the Guardian.

Each year a small proportion of the thousands referred to Prevent are referred on to the Channel programme for more intensive support.

DCS Dominic Murphy said after the verdicts: "He spent some time in Prevent and then came out of Prevent and by his own admission carried on his activity in secret over many years, forming his plan and conducting reconnaissance and focusing his efforts on many MPs."

A government-commissioned review of Prevent is expected to be published this month or next.

Ali will be sentenced on Wednesday and the crown may ask the court to impose a whole-life tariff, meaning he will never be released.

Mr Justice Sweeney said the jury had faced harrowing evidence and excused them from jury duty for a decade, adding: "This is the sort of case none of us will ever forget."

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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	04/11 Wooden skyscrapers are on the rise
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/wooden-skyscrapers-are-on-the-rise-11649693924?mod=hp_listc_pos2">https://www.wsj.com/articles/wooden-skyscrapers-are-on-the-rise-11649693924?mod=hp_listc_pos2</a>
GIST	<p>Guests at a new 20-story hotel and cultural center in Skellefteå, a former gold-mining community in northeastern Sweden, don't have to step outside to feel immersed in the natural world. The floors, ceilings and support beams of the building—which also houses a museum and other facilities—are made almost entirely of spruce and pine harvested from nearby woodlands.</p> <p>"When you come inside, the smell of the timber is almost like you enter a forest," Robert Schmitz, a partner at an architectural firm in Stockholm and the building's lead architect, says of the Sara Cultural Centre and Wood Hotel. "This is a really small city, and timber is something that everyone in this community has a connection to. They understand the material."</p> <p>The 323,000-square-foot complex is part of an emerging trend as architects, developers and builders turn to so-called mass timber, wood that is glued and pressed in special ways to make it similar in strength to concrete and steel and thus capable of replacing those building materials even for skyscrapers and other massive edifices.</p> <p>Advocates of mass-timber construction maintain that it can be more environmentally friendly than conventional construction. The carbon footprint of a building constructed with sustainably harvested mass timber, which is made from trees that are selectively cut rather than clear-cut, can be half that of a similar</p>

building made of concrete and steel, according to an assessment of mass timber construction published recently in the journal Sustainability.

“If you look at the carbon impact of harvesting trees and turning them into buildings, it gives you a much better number than you get from concrete or steel,” says Stephen Shaler, a professor of sustainable materials and technology at the University of Maine. “As long as you have sustainably managed forests—and we have that capacity—it is a clear winner on the carbon footprint.”

The number of multistory mass-timber buildings being built in the U.S. rose 50% between July 2020 and December 2021 to more than 1,300 structures, according to the wood trade group WoodWorks. Among the projects are an eight-story office building in Charlottesville, Va., a new Google five-story office building scheduled to open in August in Sunnyvale, Calif., and a 25-story residential-retail complex rising in Milwaukee. The International Building Code permits wooden buildings of up to 18 stories, but the developers of the Milwaukee project say they obtained a variance after submitting data to city officials showing it was as safe as a conventional building.

Even more ambitious projects may appear: A Japanese timber company has proposed a 70-story wood building for Tokyo, while a U.K.-based architectural firm has plans for an 80-story skyscraper in London.

To meet the demand for mass timber, 18 manufacturing plants have been built in the U.S. and Canada since 2014, according to the U.S. Forest Service. The global market for mass timber was estimated at \$956 million in 2020 and is expected to grow at an annual rate of 13.6% from 2021 to 2028, according to a December 2021 report by Grand View Research.

In addition to potential environmental benefits, construction experts say mass-timber buildings can cost less than concrete-and-steel structures—especially if they’re sited near a manufacturing plant where pieces of the building are cut to order. With mass timber, for example, builders don’t have to pour concrete and wait for it to set. Mr. Schmitz and the team behind the Sara Cultural Centre say they saved a year in construction and labor costs as the wood panels and beams were made at a nearby plant.

Using mass timber cut the timeline for the Milwaukee complex, called Ascent, by about four months, says Tim Gokhman, managing director of the Milwaukee-based New Land Enterprises and the project’s manager. Because wood is lighter, only 100 support piles had to be driven into the site’s soft soil rather than the 200 that would have been needed for a similar concrete-and-steel building. And whereas pouring concrete floors might require 30 to 40 workers, he said, only 10 workers were needed to install the cross-laminated timber, or CLT, panels for each floor.

CLT is made by laying down and gluing together multiple wooden pieces oriented at 90-degree angles to one another and is commonly used for floors and walls. Another key type of mass timber, called glulam for glue-laminated timber, is commonly used for support beams.

“Each piece of wood is measured and has a designated place,” Mr. Gokhman says. “So as the building is built, you’re literally updating its progress in a digital world. Without that technology, you don’t have the same efficiency and schedule gains.”

Some point to limitations of mass timber, saying that buildings made with both conventional and mass-timber construction can have advantages over those made solely of wood or solely of steel and concrete.

“In a tall building, you really do want the base of it to be concrete, and as you go up in the building it gets lighter, and makes more use of wood,” says University of Oregon architecture professor Judith Sheine, who has designed buildings using both mass timber and concrete and steel. And conventional construction might be better in coastal areas, she says, adding, “If you’re in a flood zone, the base should still be concrete because getting wood wet is not that great.”

Some fear the mass-timber trend could spur timber companies to cut down old-growth forests that contain large amounts of carbon rather than selectively harvesting younger forests. They argue that calculations of



the carbon footprints of mass timber buildings must include roots, branches and other parts of trees that are often burned as well as the fossil fuels consumed to cut down the trees, fabricate the wood products and transport them to construction sites.

“We’re not going to log our way out of the climate crisis,” says Jason Grant, manager of corporate engagement, forests, for the World Wildlife Foundation in San Francisco. “There are objective limits to how much timber we can produce and consume. We need to bear in mind the constraints that we need to operate in if we want to avoid climate disaster and stem nature loss.”

Seismic testing of a 10-story tall wooden building scheduled to take place in California this fall could give a boost to the mass-timber trend. “We need to find a way to make these buildings earthquake-resistant, since it’s a new building type, and nobody’s ever done this before,” says Shiling Pei, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering at the Colorado School of Mines and the project leader for the shake test.

To minimize the risk of fire, builders and architects are incorporating precautions into mass timber buildings, says David Barber, a Washington, D.C.-based fire safety engineer with the multinational design, engineering and architectural firm Arup. He points to covering CLT wall and floor panels in taller mass timber buildings with fire-rated drywall rather than leaving them exposed, for example, and checking the fire rating for connection points between the timber panels as well as the glue connecting the panels and laminated timber.

“We want to make sure that the buildings are done in very conservative ways, so they are being designed to a very high level of safety,” says Mr. Barber, who has worked on both the Ascent building in Milwaukee and the eight-story Apex building in Charlottesville.

Tests of a two-story mass timber apartment conducted in 2017 at a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms facility in Beltsville, Md., showed that it took longer to catch fire and retained its structural integrity longer than a similar wood-frame structure.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Chile’s unprecedented plan to ration water</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/11/santiago-chile-ration-water-drought">https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/11/santiago-chile-ration-water-drought</a>
GIST	<p>As a punishing, record-breaking drought enters its 13th year, <a href="#">Chile</a> has announced an unprecedented plan to ration water for the capital of Santiago, a city of nearly 6 million.</p> <p>“A city can’t live without water,” Claudio Orrego, the governor of the Santiago metropolitan region, said in a press conference. “And we’re in an unprecedented situation in Santiago’s 491-year history where we have to prepare for there to not be enough water for everyone who lives here.”</p> <p>The plan features a four-tier alert system that goes from green to red and starts with public service announcements, moves on to restricting water pressure and ends with rotating water cuts of up to 24 hours for about 1.7 million customers.</p> <p>The alert system is based on the capacity of the Maipo and Mapocho rivers, which supply the capital with most of its water and have seen dwindling water levels as the drought drags on.</p> <p>The government estimates that the country’s water availability has dropped 10% to 37% over the last 30 years and could drop another 50% in northern and central Chile by 2060.</p> <p>The water deficit in the rivers, measured in liters per second, will determine if cuts will take place every 12, six or four days. In each case, a different area would face water cuts each day.</p>

	<p>“This is the first time in history that Santiago has a water rationing plan due to the severity of climate change,” Orrego said. “It’s important for citizens to understand that climate change is here to stay. It’s not just global, it’s local.”</p> <p>Areas fed by well water or other sources besides the two rivers will be exempt from the cuts.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Overdraft fees cost more than burglaries?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/verify/yes-overdraft-fees-cost-americans-more-than-burglaries-non-sufficient-funds-banks-credit-unions/536-13e7918d-cacc-46d0-8b89-fdb8dcd5007a">https://www.king5.com/article/news/verify/yes-overdraft-fees-cost-americans-more-than-burglaries-non-sufficient-funds-banks-credit-unions/536-13e7918d-cacc-46d0-8b89-fdb8dcd5007a</a>
GIST	<p>Banks and credit unions have been getting pushback for their long-standing use of overdraft fees, or penalties for covering a purchase when a customer doesn’t have enough funds in their account.</p> <p>A user on Twitter wrote “it’s expensive to be poor,” <a href="#">alongside a meme</a> that compared financial losses incurred by Americans in 2011 from both overdraft fees and burglary. The graphic claims the cost of burglary totaled \$4.8 billion, while overdraft fees accounted for \$30.8 billion in losses, a difference of more than six-fold. The post has been shared more than 14,000 times. <a href="#">Another post</a> references the same numbers.</p> <p><b>THE QUESTION</b> Did overdraft fees cost Americans more than six times as much as burglaries in 2011?</p> <p><b>THE SOURCES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Consumer Financial Protection Bureau</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">FBI</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Moebs Services</a></li> <li>• Bruce McClary, Senior Vice President, Membership &amp; Communications, <a href="#">National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)</a></li> </ul> <p><b>THE ANSWER</b> Yes, overdraft fees cost Americans more than six times as much as burglaries in 2011.</p> <p><b>WHAT WE FOUND</b> The meme’s data correctly shows overdraft fees cost Americans more than six times as much as burglaries in 2011, a difference that nearly doubled by 2019, VERIFY confirmed.</p> <p>VERIFY checked the sources listed at the bottom of the graphic: An economic research group called <a href="#">Moebs Services</a> that studies overdraft fees, and <a href="#">FBI crime data</a>.</p> <p>The meme’s first statistic, which cites Moebs Services, says Americans paid \$30.8 billion in overdraft fees in 2011. <a href="#">That report</a> did indeed find banks and credit unions took in \$30.8 billion in overdraft revenue during the fiscal year ending in June 2011. Moebs’ data was later cited in a 2013 report on overdraft fees published by the <a href="#">Consumer Financial Protection Bureau</a>.</p> <p>The second data point cited in the viral meme is from the FBI. The tweet claims victims of burglary, or the “the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft,” as defined by the FBI, lost \$4.8 billion in 2011. That’s true; the <a href="#">bureau's data</a> from 2011 reports the same amount was lost in burglaries that year.</p> <p>Burglaries differ from robberies and larcenies, which do not involve illegal entry into a home or building. The FBI estimates Americans lost an additional \$6.4 billion to <a href="#">robberies</a> and <a href="#">"larceny-theft"</a> crimes in 2011.</p>

Though the FBI [has reported declines](#) in burglary losses since 2011, banks' revenue from overdraft fees has largely remained consistent. [Moeb's Services reported](#) overdraft fees totaled \$31.3 billion in 2020 and \$32 billion in 2021.

Overdraft protection is not automatically the default for all bank accounts. Customers legally must opt-in in order for their bank to provide this service, which was originally "created in the spirit of convenience" when checks were mailed, [according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#).

But the CFPB also says financial institutions have become too reliant on overdraft penalties and similar non-sufficient funds fees (NSF), or charges for bounced transactions.

[Since 2015, the agency has taken legal action](#) against multiple financial institutions for deceptive or fraudulent overdraft practices and marketing and collected data on how these fees affect consumers. In 2021, CFPB Director Rohit Chopra [announced](#) the organization would pay close attention to banks that rely heavily on overdraft fees.

"Over time...banks figured out how to make even more money off depositors for the 'privilege' of holding their money. Rather than compete on the highest interest rate to attract customers, our nation's largest banks now provide hardly any interest on deposits and charge billions in fees," CFPB Director Rohit Chopra said in an announcement about the initiative.

On April 6, attorneys general in 15 states plus D.C. [urged](#) JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America, U.S. Bank and Wells Fargo to eliminate overdraft fees, citing the charges' disproportionate effect on people of color and low-income customers.

Some banks have already made changes. In January, [Bank of America](#) announced it would eliminate and reduce some fees related to low account balances. [Citi](#) announced in February it would cut overdraft fees altogether, following similar moves from [Capital One](#) and [Ally](#) in 2021.

But many experts say too many vulnerable customers are still falling prey to these fees. Critics say the charges, typically around \$35, often push cash-strapped customers further into debt.

Some banks will continue to charge for every day the account remains in the negative, according to the [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation \(FDIC.\)](#) Without money to pay off negative balances, charges can snowball.

CFPB data shows less than 9% of bank customers pay 10 or more overdrafts per year, making up close to 80% of all overdraft revenue. Frequent overdrafters are also more likely to have a lower credit score, implying their access to credit cards is limited, the CFPB [also concluded in a 2017 report](#).

"These overdraft fees are the same dollar amount for somebody making minimum wage as they are for somebody making a hundred thousand dollars a year. It is hitting people hard, especially those who are struggling the most right now," said Bruce McClary, senior vice president for Membership & Communications at the [National Foundation for Credit Counseling \(NFCC.\)](#)

Avoiding these fees can also be confusing when juggling low balances. It's not always clear when recently-deposited funds will be available to cover pending charges, or when purchases will post to an account.

"Many large banks today penalize their own customers based on things outside their control like the difference between authorization and settlement, the significance of the timing gap between the two, the amount of time a credit may take to show up in the account, the use of one kind of balance over another for fee calculation purposes, or the order of transaction processing across different types of credit and debits," [Chopra said in 2021](#).

	To avoid uncertainty, McClary recommends reading the fine print to understand the most cost-effective way to avoid fees. He also suggested setting up automated alerts that will send notifications when an account's balance is low.
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Portland 1<sup>st</sup> measurable snowfall in April</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Portland-sees-1st-measurable-snow-in-April-in-17072758.php">https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Portland-sees-1st-measurable-snow-in-April-in-17072758.php</a>
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Portland, Oregon, received the first measurable snowfall in April in recorded history on Monday as the greater metropolitan region racked up more than a half-foot of snow in some places from an unusual spring storm.</p> <p>The National Weather Service said 1.6 inches (4 centimeters) of snow fell at Portland International Airport, setting a record with the only measurable amount of snow there since official record-keeping began in 1940, the National Weather Service said.</p> <p>Schools across the region were closed and some areas about an hour west of Portland received up to several inches of the white stuff.</p> <p>Utility company Portland General Electric reported more than 55,000 customers were without power in a six-county region of western Oregon at the storm's peak.</p> <p>A winter storm warning was in effect on Mount Hood for the next 24 hours and between 12 and 24 inches (30.48 and 61 cms) of the white stuff was expected to fall.</p> <p>Seven inches *17.8 cm) fell in Happy Valley, a suburb southeast of Portland, and 7.6 inches (19.3 cm) also fell in Camas, Washington to the northeast.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 India northwest unusual early heat wave</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/indias-northwest-reels-unusual-early-heat-wave-84010505">https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/indias-northwest-reels-unusual-early-heat-wave-84010505</a>
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- An unusually early heat wave brought more extreme temperatures Monday to a large swath of India's northwest, raising concerns that such weather conditions could become typical.</p> <p>The India Meteorological Department forecast that the temperature in New Delhi would reach 41.8 degrees Celsius (107.2 degrees Fahrenheit) on Monday, nearly eight degrees above normal.</p> <p>The weather agency declares a heat wave when the temperature is at least 4.5 C (8 F) above average.</p> <p>The main summer months — April, May and June — are always excruciatingly hot in most parts of India before monsoon rains bring cooler temperatures. But the heat wave has arrived early and grown particularly intense in the past decade, killing hundreds every year.</p> <p>During heat waves, the country usually also suffers severe water shortages with tens of millions of its 1.4 billion people lacking running water.</p> <p>Extreme temperatures have struck large parts of northern and western India in the last week, with Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and New Delhi among the worst hit. Higher temperatures also were felt in relatively cooler Indian-controlled Kashmir in the Himalayas, where many Indians go to escape the summer heat.</p> <p>Already this year, India has recorded its warmest March since 1901.</p> <p>The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns that heat waves and humidity-related heat stress will intensify in South Asia, and scientists who study climate change say Indians can expect more of the same hot temperatures in the coming years.</p>

	<p>Vimal Mishra, an expert at the Indian Institute of Technology's Water and Climate Lab, said the number of Indian states hit by heat waves has grown in recent years, as extreme temperatures become more frequent and intense.</p> <p>"If you are looking for the clearest signal of climate change in India, then heat waves are a classic example. They are unavoidable and will occur more frequently," Mishra said.</p> <p>Heat waves are especially dangerous for daily wage workers, rickshaw drivers, street vendors and the homeless, many of whom have to work outside in hot conditions and are at the greatest risk of heat exhaustion and heatstroke.</p> <p>India's worst heat wave since 1992 was in 2015, when at least 2,081 people died.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 NKorea razing SKorea hotel, golf course</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/seoul-north-korea-destroying-korean-owned-golf-84027521">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/seoul-north-korea-destroying-korean-owned-golf-84027521</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL, South Korea -- North Korea is destroying a South Korean-owned golf course at a scenic mountain resort in the second confirmed case of South Korean assets being eliminated in an area where the rivals once ran a joint tour program, officials said Tuesday in Seoul.</p> <p>North Korea's demolition of South Korean-built facilities at its Diamond Mountain resort comes as ties between the countries remain strained over the North's recent series of high-profile missile tests.</p> <p>Responding to queries by The Associated Press, Seoul's Unification Ministry said it has confirmed North Korea is demolishing the golf resort in addition to a South Korean-owned hotel there. Last Friday, the ministry said North Korea was dismantling the Haegumgang Hotel, a floating hotel docked at a coastal area in the resort.</p> <p>The ministry said it strongly urges North Korea to stop destroying the South Korean facilities. It demanded North Korea return to talks to address the issue.</p> <p>The two Koreas jointly ran a tour project at the resort for about 10 years during an earlier era of inter-Korean detente. The tours drew an estimated 2 million South Korean visitors and served as a rare source of foreign currency for the impoverished North. But South Korea suspended the project in 2008 after one of its tourists was fatally shot by a North Korean soldier there.</p> <p>After their relations improved in 2018, the two Koreas pushed to resume stalled cooperation projects including the mountain tours. But Seoul eventually failed to do so without defying U.S.-led sanctions that kept the tours from restarting. In 2019, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered officials to tear down South Korean-owned assets in the resort, but the demolition was delayed due to worries about the spread of the coronavirus.</p> <p>North Korea has sought sanctions relief and other concessions from the United States and South Korea to revive its moribund economy. Some experts say its recent weapons testing activity was meant to perfect its missile technology and boost its leverage in future negotiations with its rivals.</p> <p>Besides the golf resort and floating hotel, South Korea owns other facilities in the resort such as spas, a culture center, accommodations, a duty free shop, karaoke rooms and a building used for reunions of Korean families separated by war. The fate of those facilities was unclear.</p> <p>The North's state media reported Tuesday that a fire in the Diamond Mountain area over the weekend destroyed unspecified facilities and hundreds of hectares of forests. It said the blaze was put out on Sunday.</p>

	It wasn't immediately known if the fire was related to the demolition of the South Korean facilities at the resort. The South Korean Unification Ministry said it was trying to find out if the fire caused any damage to its facilities in the resort.
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 US sanctions Western Balkan officials</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/04/12/Western-Balkan-officials-sanctioned/4781649730191/">https://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2022/04/12/Western-Balkan-officials-sanctioned/4781649730191/</a>
GIST	<p>April 11 (UPI) -- The Biden administration blacklisted seven people and one entity in four Balkan nations on Monday, accusing them of committing corruption that threatens stability throughout the region.</p> <p>The sanctions imposed by the Treasury target former high-ranking government officials and a media mogul in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia with the sole entity being based in Hungary.</p> <p>"The people designated today constitute a serious threat to regional stability, institutional trust and the aspirations of those seeking democratic and judicious governance in the Western Balkans," Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in a statement.</p> <p>Among those targeted was Svetozar Marovic, who was the last president of the Serbia and Montenegro common state, which dissolved in 2006 with Serbia and Montenegro declaring their independence.</p> <p>Marovic was also the Montenegro Democratic Party of Socialists president until 2015, the year he was arrested by Montenegro authorities on suspicion of using his influence in the party to approve property purchases and construction deals that benefited companies while causing significant losses to the Adriatic Sea city of Budva.</p> <p>In 2016, he signed two plea deals admitting to the corruption charges for which he was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison and ordered to pay a fine of \$1 million but fled to neighboring Serbia where he is reported to be living.</p> <p>"The Svetozar Marovic case is the definition of impunity," Judy Rising Reinke, the U.S. ambassador to Montenegro, said in a statement Monday. "We hope today's actions will further galvanize the [Montenegro] authorities to tackle corruption. We know the public demands it."</p> <p>"This is a beginning," she said.</p> <p>Nikola Gruevski, the prime minister of North Macedonia from 2006 to 2016, was also named for sanctions on accusations of abuse of office, money laundering and other offenses.</p> <p>Two years after he was forced from office, Gruevski was convicted by a North Macedonia court on correction-related charges but has evaded capture in Hungary where he owns and directs I.C.I.C KFT, a limited liability company in Pecel, which was also sanctioned Monday.</p> <p>Following the announcement, Gruevski took to social media to refute the charges.</p> <p>"The allegations for which I am on the list are inaccurate information that they have succumbed to and mostly stem from the long-standing political persecution against me in Macedonia," he said in a statement. "[A]lthough I do not have any property in the United States, I feel great injustice because I worked very honestly and very responsibly, fighting for state and national interests."</p> <p>"I have never worked for personal financial or material gain," he said. "I will continue to fight to prove the truth. I will continue to fight for Macedonia."</p>



The Treasury also sanctioned Aqif Rakipi, a former Albania Parliament member; Ylli Ndroqi, a media mogul whose assets were seized by Tirana in 2020 and 2021.

Those in Bosnia and Herzegovina hit with sanctions are Asim Sarajilic, a member of parliament and a former high-ranking Party of Democratic Action official, and Gordana Tadic, former chief prosecutor of the State Prosecutors Office until 2021 when she was removed from her position.

In North Macedonia, Sasho Mijalkov, the nation's former chief of counterintelligence, was blacklisted on accusations of engaging in a vote scheme and illegal wiretapping of 20,000 people.

The sanctions, which freeze all their assets in the United States and bar U.S. persons from doing business with them, were imposed under an executive order President Joe Biden signed in June to expand authorities to levy punitive measures against those contributing to the destabilizing situation in the Western Balkans.

It is the second time sanctions under that executive order have been used.

"Combatting corruption around the world is a major priority of the Biden-Harris administration, and Treasury will not hesitate to use all tools at our disposal to hold corrupt and destabilizing actors accountable," Nelson said.

At the State Department, Gruevski, Mijalkov and Tadic were designated for U.S. entry bans as well as members their immediate family members.

"Together, these designations reaffirm the U.S. commitment to supporting the rule of law and strengthening democratic institutions of the Republic of North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina," Ned Price, State Department spokesman, said in a statement. "The department will continue to use authorities like this to promote accountability for corrupt actors in this region and globally."

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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Mexican cartels fuel Colombia violence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-04-12/mexican-cartels-swap-arms-for-cocaine-fueling-colombia-violence">https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2022-04-12/mexican-cartels-swap-arms-for-cocaine-fueling-colombia-violence</a>
GIST	<p>BOGOTA (Reuters) - Mexican drug cartels appear to be shipping high-powered weapons to Colombia to purchase shipments of cocaine, a trade Colombian authorities say is fueling the deadly struggle between rival traffickers for control of the nation's drug routes.</p> <p>A bevy of machine guns, assault rifles and semi-automatic handguns are flowing into the South American country, a dozen Colombian law enforcement officials told Reuters.</p> <p>Among the weapons popping up in traffickers' arsenals is the Belgium-made FN Five-seveN pistol, sources said. Nicknamed the "cop killer," the 5.7-caliber weapon can penetrate bullet-proof vests.</p> <p>Most of the 1,478 long arms confiscated from Colombian armed groups in 2020 and 2021 were foreign-made and imported clandestinely, the police say, along the same smuggling routes used to get drugs out.</p> <p>Mexican drug gangs have easy access to guns purchased in the United States and long-term business relationships with Colombian armed groups, from whom they have purchased cocaine for decades, Colombian authorities said.</p> <p>Now cartel emissaries are increasingly paying for shipments of cocaine with guns, authorities say, in part to avoid the need to move large quantities of cash across borders.</p>

The potent firepower of the cartel-supplied arsenal has potential implications for Colombia's security. Heavy arms in the hands of criminals put law enforcement at risk and could further complicate the troubled implementation of a 2016 peace deal between Bogota and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels.

Last year 148 members of the armed forces and the national police were killed in Colombia, the highest figure in six years and a 57% increase from 2020, according to figures from the Ministry of Defense.

"What illegal armed groups in Colombia are doing is using the Mexicans to equal and exceed the armed forces of the state in terms of weaponry," an official at the police's Anti-Terrorism and Arms Tracing Information Center (CIARA) said.

"In the future, that could have serious implications, like an increase in hostilities," according to the official, who said armed groups may use the weapons not only against law enforcement but in battles with each other.

The agency authorized the person to speak to Reuters on the condition they not be identified.

The Colombian police say they have a permanent dialogue with their U.S. and Mexican counterparts on keeping weapons out of drug traffickers' hands.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) declined to comment, while the Mexican government did not respond to Reuters questions.

#### MEXICAN CONNECTION

Colombian authorities say the battle for control of their country's drug trade is waged between former FARC members who reject the peace accord; guerrillas from the still-active National Liberation Army (ELN); and members of a plethora of criminal syndicates, including the Clan del Golfo, Colombia's largest cartel.

Though FARC dissidents and the ELN espouse some of the same Marxist ideals, and they occasionally allied against the government during the height of the civil war, they now regularly fight each other and rival crime gangs to dominate lucrative drug routes, security officials said.

Law enforcement encounters with these groups are turning up powerful weapons.

In mid-December last year, Colombia's army conducted an operation against FARC dissidents in southwestern Narino province, a major coca-producing region. The military said it captured 16 people and seized a cache of weapons, including 24 U.S.-made M16 assault rifles and AR-15 semiautomatic rifles.

A similar haul was found in a different FARC dissident camp in the southern jungle province of Caqueta in 2019, according to the army: a M60 machine gun, an AR-15 rifle with an added scope for use by a sniper, and a dozen assault rifles, including M4s and M16s.

Authorities said they believe such guns are supplied by Mexico's Sinaloa, Zeta and Jalisco New Generation cartels, all of which have emissaries on Colombian soil.

Their representatives are present in 11 of Colombia's 32 provinces, according to a 2021 police intelligence report seen by Reuters.

The Sinaloa cartel, once headed by jailed kingpin Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, has the most extensive geographic reach and deepest relationships with Colombian armed groups, the report said.

Some 55 Mexicans have been accused or convicted of drug trafficking offenses in Colombia in the last three years, according to the national prisons agency.

Colombia's national police said last week they had captured Brian Donaciano Olguin, a Mexican national whom they allege served as the Sinaloa cartel's most important go-between with FARC dissidents, calling his arrest the most important yet of a cartel emissary. Reuters was unable to contact Olguin or determine if he has legal counsel.

Mexico's warring drug gangs have been bulking up on military-grade armaments at home, alarming officials in their own country.

Last year, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's government sued gunmakers, accusing them of facilitating weapons trafficking, which the gunmakers deny.

U.S. gunmakers support stronger enforcement of existing laws, including imprisoning people who steal and smuggle guns, Mark Oliva, director for public affairs at the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearms industry trade group, said in an email.

Guns are a handy form of currency for gangsters.

Paying coke suppliers with weapons, rather than bulky cash, helps Mexican cartels launder profits and move money around more easily, said General Fernando Murillo, head of DIJIN, the investigative division of Colombia's national police.

"Every day (conducting) drug trafficking through cash payments gets more difficult. So now they are using different methods: a Mexican cartel might pay with sophisticated arms," Murillo said.

#### TRADING UP

Until the 1990s, Colombian guerrillas and right-wing paramilitaries largely used Russian-made AK-47s left over from wars in Central America, officials from the police and armed forces told Reuters.

As drug trafficking expanded and grew more lucrative, armed groups upgraded to newer AK-47s, U.S.-made M16s and AR-15s and Israeli-made Tavor assault rifles, police officials said. While some guns go for as little as \$500 in Colombia, machine guns can fetch up to \$5,000, they said.

The leaders of the Segunda Marquetalia, a group of FARC dissidents, have appeared repeatedly in YouTube videos armed with Tavor assault rifles likely supplied by Mexican cartels, according to the police's CIARA center.

The U.S. DEA estimates Colombian criminal groups earn some \$10 billion from drug transactions per year.

The flow of weapons southward comes as Colombian provinces like Norte de Santander, on the border with Venezuela, and Narino and Cauca, on the Pacific coast, have seen increases in coca production and associated violence by armed groups, despite U.S.-backed efforts by President Ivan Duque to slash narcotics production.

The Clan del Golfo alone moves some 20 tonnes of cocaine per month for clients including the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels, according to Colombian police, who say the Clan's gangster allies in Medellin have used the FN Five-seveN pistol in internal disputes.

It is possible some cartel-supplied guns enter Colombia through Venezuela, officials from the Colombian police and army say.

Dissident leaders like Ivan Marquez, who heads Segunda Marquetalia, meet in Venezuela with Sinaloa and Jalisco emissaries, General Jorge Luis Vargas, the head of the national police, told Reuters.

	Bogota has long accused Venezuela's government of providing refuge for Colombian armed groups, including dissidents, allegations denied by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.
	The Venezuelan government did not respond to a request for comment.
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 'Operation New Day' crackdown; impacts?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://publicola.com/2022/04/11/a-month-after-operation-new-day-crackdown-impacts-on-crime-remain-unclear/">https://publicola.com/2022/04/11/a-month-after-operation-new-day-crackdown-impacts-on-crime-remain-unclear/</a>
GIST	<p>A month has passed since the Seattle Police Department moved its mobile precinct to the intersection of Third Ave. and Pine St. in downtown Seattle, scattering an open-air market for drugs and stolen merchandise that had recently been the scene of two murders.</p> <p>SPD has maintained a presence at the intersection since then as part of a push to crack down on crime downtown called Operation New Day, mostly making arrests for shoplifting and other misdemeanor crimes. Unlike a similar crackdown in the Little Saigon neighborhood in February, there have been few felony arrests in the long-troubled area. Meanwhile, the social services that Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said would follow the sweep at Third and Pine are still on hold.</p> <p>Senior Deputy Mayor Monisha Harrell says that the relative scarcity of felony arrests doesn't tell the full story. "Felonies take a while—you've got to build those cases," she said. Unlike at 12th Ave. and S. Jackson St. in Little Saigon, where federal law enforcement began investigating a similar illicit market and a pattern of EBT fraud long before SPD cleared the intersection, Harrell said the sweep of Third and Pine was a direct response to the shootings on February 27 and March 2 that killed 52-year-old Reno Maiava and 15-year-old Michael Del Bianco, respectively. SPD later arrested suspects in both shootings, though neither arrest took place on Third; officers tracked Maiava's killer to a Tukwila motel, while Del Bianco's killer turned himself in at SPD's West Precinct.</p> <p>Harrell added that while SPD is still working with federal partners to make drug arrests in the area, the investigations require patience. "We're not trying to get the low-level dealers," she said. "We're trying to get the folks who are a little further up the food chain, and you can't put that on a calendar."</p> <p>Judges have already released many of the people arrested at both Third and Pine and 12th and Jackson; one man released by a King County Superior Court judge after his arrest in Little Saigon reappeared along Third, where SPD officers arrested him again for drug possession and carrying a gun illegally. According to Harrell, the repeat arrests have frustrated some prosecutors. "What I'm hearing from prosecutors is that they're making their best cases and their strongest recommendations" to judges, she said, "and sometimes they're feeling unheard."</p> <p>According to US Attorney Nick Brown, finding a "high-level" drug dealer at an intersection like Third and Pine—or at any of the encampments in greater downtown that SPD has swept in the past two months—is unlikely. Most of the dealers whose crimes could rise to the federal level, he says, "are, in fact, not Washingtonians. ... Most of the people we identify as significant in those cases are not even in Seattle; many are in Mexico or California. Those that are here only come for a short period of time." Brown's office has the discretion to decide which cases rise to the federal level; the King County Prosecutor's Office handles the vast majority of felony cases. So far, Brown's office has taken four cases from the crackdowns in Little Saigon and along Third Ave.</p> <p>In the view of some skeptics of the operation, most of the behavior drawing negative attention at Third and Pine doesn't rise to the felony level. "Most of what people complain about aren't felonies," said Kevin Toth, a social worker with the King County Department of Public Defense. "Drug dealing, sure. Robberies, shootings, also, yes. But most of the atmosphere down there is the result of lawful behaviors or misdemeanors at worst."</p>

Meanwhile, the operation at Third and Pine has re-opened the direct line between police officers and the Public Defender Association-run program LEAD, the city's primary diversion option for people who commit crimes related to behavioral health issues or extreme poverty. LEAD's early model relied on referrals from arresting officers—so-called “arrest diversions”—but in the past two years, the program shifted focus, relying instead on community groups, business organizations, outreach workers and prosecutors to refer clients for diversion. Community referrals don't create an arrest record—one reason the program began shifting away from arrest diversions to begin with.

However, according to LEAD project director Tara Moss, that trend is reversing. “We're now seeing the current mayor's office and SPD leadership break the logjam and start sending LEAD referrals again” after a two-year pause on arrest referrals, she said. In 2021, LEAD received one arrest diversion; this year, the program has received eight arrest diversions. Moss also noted that while the program currently has some “capacity issues” as a result of a new wave of referrals, she anticipates that LEAD will be able to take on more clients later this year.

Since officers haven't done arrest diversions in years, Harrell said, SPD is currently retraining officers on how to engage with LEAD and introducing officers hired in the past two years to the program for the first time.

SPD did not arrest everyone at the open-air market on Third and Pine; some scattered to nearby corners, to Pioneer Square, or to other parts of the city. V, an organizer with the drug user solidarity group DUST, says that dispersing people—many of them unhoused—across the city by sweeping corners like Third and Pine can create tension in the places where those people land. “[It] puts a strain on the homeless people in each neighborhood because the service providers there have limited capacity,” they said. Newcomers can trigger conflicts, V added, that can escalate into violence.

The weeks following SPD's clearance of Third and Pine have not been peaceful. Eighteen people were shot or stabbed in the past month or so, most of them in or near encampments; in response to some of those shootings, the city cleared encampments in Chinatown, Little Saigon, and the University District. But Harrell disputes that the sweeps in the downtown core fueled an increase in violence elsewhere. “People's perceptions and urban myths are not always fact,” she said. In Ballard, for instance—the site of two shootings, one of them fatal, in the past month—the deputy mayor said that a pattern of gun violence long predates the crackdowns in downtown Seattle.

Nevertheless, people have moved from the encampments and corners swept by SPD, and many of the people detained during those sweeps have left jail with no place to go.

In US Attorney Brown's view, while the city's efforts to clear Third and Pine have made the intersection feel safer, the city needs to do more to make the strategy sustainable. “There's plenty of evidence that suggest that ‘hot spot’ initiatives work and don't just move crime, but also reduce crime,” he said. “What makes that sustainable are all the things outside of law enforcement and prosecutors' purview, and especially social services and housing,” as well as health care.

But not everyone agrees that the hot spot approach—and Operation New Day itself—has actually improved public safety. “Operation New Day is positioned to damage lives and undermine community safety by prosecuting and incarcerating members of our community who need housing and other community-based services and support,” said Anita Khandelwal, the director of King County's Department of Public Defense. “For a new day to occur in in Seattle, we need to invest in affordable housing and mental and behavioral health support and divest from the expensive and racially disproportionate criminal legal system.”

So far, the city hasn't brought new social services online to support SPD's operations in greater downtown. City Councilmember Andrew Lewis, the chair of the council's housing and homelessness committee, has argued repeatedly that one of city's best options for people involved in the criminal-justice system is the housing and case management program JustCARE. “I wish we could all get together and be

	<p>like, “Okay, look, we all agree this is a good idea—how can we keep it so it keeps going and build it to be permanent?” he said.</p> <p>Harrell said her office wants to take time to assess other options. “If JustCARE is doing the best job, if it’s the best use of our resources, then we have to figure out what organizations may not be able to use resources as well,” the deputy mayor said. “But there are other organizations that do the same body of work. We can’t just listen to success stories from JustCARE... Maybe other organizations are just not as successful at promoting what they do.”</p> <p>Another option on the table to sustain SPD’s efforts downtown, Harrell said, could be opening smaller satellite police precincts—possibly in vacant storefronts. “As we increase in density, it might not make sense to have precincts covering these massive geographic areas,” she said. “It could make more sense to have closer resources for communities.” If SPD moves forward with the satellite precinct concept, she added, both the downtown core and the International District are on the short list for new locations.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Seattle: 2 mammoth tusks stolen 9months</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/two-different-mammoth-tusks-stolen-in-seattle-within-nine-months/281-8ccbd678-9346-42c4-9b68-1e3f0fd22108">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/two-different-mammoth-tusks-stolen-in-seattle-within-nine-months/281-8ccbd678-9346-42c4-9b68-1e3f0fd22108</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The hallways and lobbies of John Pohl’s aptly named Tusk building serve as a display for his collection of prehistoric artifacts. His crown jewel is a chunk of woolly mammoth tusk. That piece was stolen in July of last year – surveillance videos capture what he believes the burglars walking out.</p> <p>“It’s not the break-in or the smashing of the glass, or the smashing of the building, it’s taking something that’s pretty much irreplaceable,” Pohl said.</p> <p>Pohl filed a report with the Seattle Police Department last summer but reached out to KING 5 after video of a <a href="#">similar burglary</a> recently aired on TV. The video shows a suspect taking off with a fossilized mammoth tusk worth \$19,000.</p> <p>“I feel violated, I’ve barely recovered from the last incident,” said Kathy Lee of Fossil &amp; Stone, an art gallery inside Pike Place Market.</p> <p>Prior to the theft, the suspect was "wandering around" the store, according to police. The suspect told store employees his mother was in the store earlier. After walking around the store some more, the suspect grabbed the tusk and ran.</p> <p>An employee followed the suspect out of the store and sprayed pepper spray in the suspect's direction as she ran toward the getaway vehicle, but it hit her instead.</p> <p>The suspect was described as a male, roughly 6 feet tall and 20-30 years old. He was wearing a black hooded sweatshirt and black baggy jeans with black and white hand tattoos.</p> <p>Seattle police say no arrest has been made in either case.</p> <p>The FBI does investigate what’s called "art and cultural property crime." Monday night an FBI spokesperson confirms the bureau is aware of both incidents but would not confirm or deny if there is an open investigation.</p> <p>As for Pohl, he says he simply wants his piece back.</p> <p>“This is heartbreaking. It’s not like somebody else can go out there and create another one. These animals are extinct,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Treasury sanctions Kinahan crime group</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/treasury-sanctions-kinahan-organized-crime-group/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/law-enforcement-and-public-safety/treasury-sanctions-kinahan-organized-crime-group/</a>
GIST	<p>The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) designated the Kinahan Organized Crime Group (KOCG) along with seven of its key members, including its Irish leaders Christopher Vincent Kinahan Senior, Daniel Joseph Kinahan, Christopher Vincent Kinahan Junior, and three associated businesses pursuant to Executive Order (E.O.) 13581, "Blocking Property of Transnational Criminal Organizations," as amended. Today's action is the result of close collaboration between OFAC, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Ireland's national police force (An Garda Síochána), the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency, and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation.</p> <p>"The Kinahan Organized Crime Group smuggles deadly narcotics, including cocaine, to Europe, and is a threat to the entire licit economy through its role in international money laundering," said Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian E. Nelson. "Criminal groups like the KOCG prey on the most vulnerable in society and bring drug-related crime and violence, including murder, to the countries in which they operate. Treasury is proud to have coordinated so closely with our international counterparts, and the U.S. government will continue to use every available resource to dismantle these criminal networks."</p> <p><b>Kinahan organized crime group</b></p> <p>The KOCG, which operates in Ireland and is also established in the United Kingdom, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates, was designated as a significant transnational criminal organization. The KOCG emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the most powerful organized crime group operating in Ireland. Since then, Irish courts have concluded that the KOCG is a murderous organization involved in the international trafficking of drugs and firearms. Criminal activities of the KOCG, including international money laundering, generate proceeds in the United Kingdom, which are then pooled together and passed to local criminals before being handed to Irish organized crime group members and laundered out of the United Kingdom. The KOCG also frequently uses Dubai as a facilitation hub for its illicit activities. Since February 2016, the KOCG has been involved in a gang war with another group in Ireland and Spain, resulting in numerous murders, including of two innocent bystanders.</p> <p><b>The Kinahan family</b></p> <p>Irish national Christopher Vincent Kinahan Senior (Christopher Sr.), currently based in Dubai, was designated for acting or purporting to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the KOCG. Demonstrative of a long history of criminality, Christopher Sr. has served prison sentences in Ireland, the Netherlands, and Belgium, including: six years for dealing heroin, two-and-a-half years for possession of cocaine, and four years for money laundering. During this time he was building a list of contacts that grew to what became known as the KOCG. Christopher Sr.'s sons, Daniel Kinahan and Christopher Jr., now manage his drug trafficking operations while Christopher Sr. oversees the property portions of the enterprise. For example, Christopher Sr. has registered a number of companies under aliases or using abbreviations of his name. Christopher Sr. has been known to have used false identity documents.</p> <p>Irish national Daniel Joseph Kinahan (Daniel Kinahan), currently based in Dubai, was designated for acting or purporting to act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, the KOCG. Each member of the KOCG reports to Daniel Kinahan, who is believed to run the day-to-day operations of the organization. Daniel Kinahan has instructed KOCG members to send money to a variety of individuals serving prison sentences, including a person convicted of attempted murder on behalf of the KOCG, and an individual imprisoned for murder on behalf of the KOCG. Daniel Kinahan, who sources large quantities of cocaine from South America, plays an integral part in organizing the supply of drugs in Ireland, and is attempting to facilitate the importation of cocaine into the United Kingdom. Daniel Kinahan is known to have used false identity documents.</p> <p>Irish national Christopher Vincent Kinahan Junior (Christopher Jr.), currently based in Dubai, was designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the KOCG. Christopher Jr. regularly contributes to a fund that is used to pay KOCG members. Additionally, Christopher Jr. responds to directives from Daniel Kinahan</p>

and has collaborated with other members of the KOCG to transport and sell narcotics in the United Kingdom. Christopher Jr. was also caught travelling with a false identity document in Germany.

### **Kinahan Associates**

Irish national Sean Gerard McGovern (Sean McGovern), currently based in Dubai, was designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, Daniel Kinahan. McGovern is Daniel Kinahan's advisor and closest confidant, and evidence indicates that all dealings with Daniel Kinahan go through Sean McGovern. Sean McGovern also has managed communications on behalf of Daniel Kinahan, and he sells multi-kilogram quantities of cocaine.

Irish national Ian Thomas Dixon (Ian Dixon), currently based in Dubai, was designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, Daniel Kinahan. Ian Dixon has arranged multiple payments on behalf of Daniel Kinahan, as well as moved bulk currency on behalf of Daniel Kinahan in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Ian Dixon also oversees a fund on behalf of Daniel Kinahan and keeps track of money owed by a narcotics trafficker.

Irish national Bernard Patrick Clancy (Bernard Clancy), currently based in Dubai, was designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the KOCG. Bernard Clancy is a key KOCG lieutenant, who, among other duties, is tasked by Daniel Kinahan with providing wages to elements within the KOCG and payments to others.

Irish national John Francis Morrissey (John Morrissey), currently based in Spain, was designated for materially assisting, sponsoring, or providing financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services to or in support of, the KOCG. John Morrissey has worked for the KOCG for several years, including as an enforcer, and facilitates international drug shipments for the organization from South America. John Morrissey is also involved in money laundering.

Nero Drinks Company Limited (Nero Drinks) is a UK-based alcoholic beverage company. Nero Drinks was designated for being owned or controlled by, directly or indirectly, John Morrissey. John Morrissey, who outwardly serves as the Nero Drinks' brand ambassador, is heavily invested in Nero Drinks and has given a significant portion of the business to Daniel Kinahan to compensate for loads of drugs seized by law enforcement. John Morrissey controls and operates Nero Drinks through his wife, the primary shareholder, who is used as a frontperson for his interests.

Hoopoe Sports LLC (Hoopoe Sports) is a UAE-based sports management and advisory company. Hoopoe Sports was designated for being owned or controlled by, directly or indirectly, Ian Dixon. Ian Dixon is a 49 percent shareholder, and he also receives 80 percent of Hoopoe Sports' profits. Ian Dixon is the sole manager of Hoopoe Sports and has full executive power over the company.

Ducashew General Trading LLC (Ducashew) is a UAE-based business management consulting company. Ducashew was designated for being owned or controlled by, directly or indirectly, Daniel Kinahan. Daniel Kinahan runs Ducashew through various individuals and is involved in its financial and business management.

### **Sanctions implications**

As a result of the action, all property and interests in property of the designated individuals or entities that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons must be blocked and reported to OFAC. OFAC's regulations generally prohibit all transactions by U.S. persons or persons within (or transiting) the United States that involve any property or interests in property of designated or otherwise blocked persons.

HEADLINE	<b>04/12 Europol targets Russia sanctions-evaders</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/europol-hit-russian/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/europol-hit-russian/</a>
GIST	<p>European police have announced a major new operation designed to crack down on Russian oligarchs and businesses looking to circumvent sanctions.</p> <p>Operation Oscar will run for at least a year as an umbrella initiative that will feature many separate investigations, Europol explained.</p> <p>The policing organization's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre will work to exchange information and intelligence with partners and provide operational support in financial crime investigations.</p> <p>A key focus appears to be on illicit flows of money, which Russian individuals and entities will be trying to move around the region in order to bypass sanctions imposed since President Putin's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>"Europol will centralize and analyze all information contributed under this operation to identify international links, criminal groups and suspects, as well as new criminal trends and patterns," <a href="#">Europol said</a>.</p> <p>"Europol will further provide tailor-made analytical support to investigations, as well as operational coordination, forensics and technical expertise, and financial support to the relevant national authorities."</p> <p>The operation will include Eurojust, the EU agency for criminal justice cooperation, which will provide legal assistance and strengthen cooperation between partners. It will also coordinate with EU borders agency Frontex, which will be closely watching any sanctioned individuals hoping to sneak into the EU.</p> <p>According to Europol, the operation will work similarly to <a href="#">Operation Sentinel</a>, another wide-ranging initiative designed to crack down on attempts to defraud the EU's massive COVID-19 recovery fund.</p> <p>The EU has joined Britain, the US and others in imposing wide-ranging economic sanctions on Russian organizations and individuals. The pressure this is creating has also had a knock-on effect on the <a href="#">cybercrime underground</a> in the country, researchers recently revealed.</p> <p>Europol investigators will have their work cut out investigating sanctions-evading efforts. Despite <a href="#">occasional successes</a>, the fight against money laundering remains one-sided. <a href="#">UN estimates</a> suggest between 2-5% of global GDP is lost this way each year.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Looking for a job after prison</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkp4xm/second-chance-employment-prison">https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkp4xm/second-chance-employment-prison</a>
GIST	<p>As Leah Farrington sat at a conference table on the first day of her new job as a law firm receptionist, she imagined all the clients she would help to navigate the confusing and intimidating legal system that she, as a formerly incarcerated person, knew all too well. A justice studies major, she had recently made the dean's list and was applying to grad school. It felt like her hard work was finally paying off.</p> <p>The woman handling new employee orientations asked Farrington why she decided to go back to school. Without hesitation, Farrington told her story: "While I was incarcerated, I realized that people really need help understanding the legal system." As Farrington spoke about her career goals and harmful legislation that she hoped to someday change, the woman reached out and dragged her offer letter back across the conference table, silently tucking it beneath a folder.</p> <p>"Her whole demeanor changed," Farrington remembers, her voice growing tight. "I had that job. I thought they were going to give me a chance. I was going to be the best reformed felon there is."</p>

Most formerly incarcerated people report that it's nearly impossible to find a job after prison, citing employer prejudice as the most significant barrier. In spite of a labor shortage, a network of nonprofits and federal initiatives like the [Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#) that rewards employers when they hire someone with a felony, and campaigns to "ban the box" – the yes-or-no job application question about having a criminal record – formerly incarcerated people struggle to find work after serving time.

The U.S. has the largest prison population per capita in the world: According to the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#), one in three Americans—over 100 million people—have a criminal record that impedes them from finding gainful employment after incarceration. Sheena Meade, director of the [Clean Slate Initiative](#), explained that the problem is even worse when you count the millions more who have never been convicted, but who face similar stigmas when their arrest record pops up in background checks for a new job. For example, if you are mistakenly arrested and released without any criminal charges, that arrest alone can jeopardize your job prospects. Black and brown Americans, who are disproportionately targeted by police, can have their job opportunities diminished regardless of whether they've ever been found guilty of a crime, relegating them and their families to a life of poverty and [shorter lifespans](#).

In recent years, second chance employers, who advocate for hiring people with criminal records, have promoted formerly incarcerated people as a viable [solution](#) for the country's [labor shortage](#). "We don't have a labor shortage. We have a second chance shortage," says John Koufos, the former executive director of the New Jersey Reentry Corporation, who now works on policy reform.

Before serving time in prison for a drunk driving accident, Koufos was a criminal defense lawyer. [Second chance employers](#) agree with him: According to the [Second Chance Business Coalition](#), a group that includes companies such as McDonald's, Home Depot, Microsoft, and Koch Industries, "more inclusive hiring" strengthens the local economy and breaks cycles of poverty. Citing a [study](#) from the Charles Koch Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management, the Second Chance Business Coalition concludes that employees with criminal records are more likely to stay in their jobs and work harder than their coworkers.

But while formerly incarcerated people are eager to find work wherever they can, they're also extremely vulnerable to exploitation. From access to housing, education and employment, the added barriers created by a criminal record haunt people long after they have served their sentences. Several employees with criminal records told VICE News they accepted low paying positions out of desperation, and felt they could not advance professionally no matter how hard they worked. Even after being released from prison, they are far less free than their coworkers, have few options and more to lose if they quit a job, and may not feel financially secure enough to report workplace abuse or join unionizing efforts.

In her first job after prison, Leah Farrington was sexually harassed by a coworker, but she couldn't quit without permission from her parole officer. She put up with the harassment, knowing that if she left her job, she risked arrest and returning to prison because like most parolees, employment was a condition of her release. Farrington also says it was humiliating that all her coworkers knew she had been to prison, and that it was impossible to keep her status private after a parole officer randomly arrived at the office for a mandatory check, wearing an intimidating gun and uniform that frightened the business' clients.

This stigma against formerly incarcerated workers, and their vulnerability to abuse, was illustrated when Florida state senator Jeff Brandes introduced a [bill](#) earlier this year proposing to pay people with criminal histories less than minimum wage. Sheena Meade accurately predicted that the [bill](#) would not pass. But it was a harbinger: Companies like Goodwill already pay employees with disabilities [less than minimum wage](#), and employers are allowed to pay workers who are [younger than 20](#) years old \$4.25 per hour. A sub-minimum wage for formerly incarcerated workers is not an impossibility.

At [Unloop](#), a Seattle-based coding school for people who have survived the carceral system, executive director Martin Lawson and partnerships manager Troy Osaki provide training for jobs in tech, a lucrative industry with well-paid jobs. Osaki said that one program participant went on to study data

science, and others connect to mentors for UX design or project management (though Osaki recognizes that not everyone can become a software engineer, and not everyone wants to).

Many formerly incarcerated people report only being able to get hired by a business owner they know personally. Victor Saucedo, a web developer who studied computer programming in prison and graduated from Unloop's bootcamp, remembers that when he first got out, "I was applying to McDonald's, Burger King, any company that I thought would be willing to hire me. I just kept getting shot down. And the same thing happened with housing."

Saucedo is currently working on an app to help youth access community resources, similar to a program he built for Santa Barbara County. He recently started his own company, [Victory Code](#), where he plans to hire other formerly incarcerated developers, creating opportunities that he wishes he had had when he was younger.

"Before Unloop, I didn't really have a sense of direction. I didn't have any professional experience prior to prison. I had all these doubts like 'Am I going to be able to emerge in the tech industry?'" With the criminal background, being Hispanic, having gang affiliations, and all these things stacked against me, I was wondering if people were going to accept me." Saucedo said that he would like to see tech companies publicly report data on how many formerly incarcerated people they employ.

"In terms of diversity, equity and inclusion, I think the justice-impacted population gets overlooked. There's so much untapped human potential," he said of his fellow coding bootcamp graduates. "They just never get afforded the opportunity."

"We are much more than what we did wrong," Leah Farrington said after her twenty-fourth job interview. "When are we going to allow people to redeem themselves? When is punishment enough? When is it okay for you to come back to the workforce?"

Farrington acknowledges that she is lucky in many ways — she has a supportive family and a safe home. Others, like Casey Sullivan, had no other option after prison than living in a South Boston homeless shelter where every person, including him, caught COVID-19.

Each morning at 5am, Sullivan and the other shelter residents walked three blocks to a staffing agency that hired them as day laborers. Many of the workers in their 50s and 60s, they did grueling construction projects for \$100 a day. "You get caught in poverty and it's hard to get out," Sullivan said.

For three years following his release in 2018, Sullivan worked while living in the shelter during a series of COVID outbreaks. Last year, Sullivan was hired as a boat deckhand, a job he learned growing up as a kid on Lake Michigan. But on his second day of work on a new boat that paid better, his job offer was retracted. Sullivan says there is no nuance to how employers and landlords view criminal records: His non-violent charges are treated the same as someone with a more dangerous history.

"I can see in certain situations where it might be important. I wouldn't want to hire some guy who ripped off a joint or something like that," Sullivan said. "I have no problem telling people I did something and I went to jail for it. I paid my price. I want to start over and do something different, but I feel like they just don't care."

After the arduous interview process, Sullivan's new deckhand job with better pay actually cost him money in the end. He is caught in the same trap as many formerly incarcerated people who try to advance their careers. He is looking for work again and remains optimistic.

Most formerly incarcerated people agree there are certain jobs they wouldn't offer to a violent offender. But they all advocate for a legal system that doesn't punish people for life even after they've served their prison sentence. Ineffective one-size-fits-all job background checks treat premeditated murder the same as a teenage shoplifting charge; or view violent assault equal to a bounced check. And although the Florida subminimum wage bill did not pass, there are no legal protections against discrimination or



	<p>pay disparity for the third of Americans who have criminal records yet still need to support themselves and their families.</p> <p>“I understand there are professions where you can’t hire someone with a criminal record,” says Leah Farrington, who is a non-violent white collar offender. “But to get rejected time and time again, it’s really tough. Because when I got out, I wanted to help people who went through the justice system.”</p> <p>Farrington is continuing to interview for jobs where she can help people. She is applying to grad school to become a licensed therapist, and wants to be a counselor for women who have survived trauma, especially after incarceration. In one year Farrington will be eligible to petition for expungement. Her future and the career she has fought so hard for largely hinges on the decision that a stranger will make about her petition. “We’ll keep our fingers crossed. There’s no guarantee. It’s just perseverance, right?”</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/12 Palestinian stabs Israel officer; shot dead</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/palestinian-man-shot-dead-after-stabbing-police-officer-in-ashkelon-israel">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/12/palestinian-man-shot-dead-after-stabbing-police-officer-in-ashkelon-israel</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>A Palestinian man stabbed a police officer with a kitchen knife and was shot dead in the Israeli port city of Ashkelon.</p> <p>Police said an officer was checking a person who had aroused his suspicion on Tuesday when “the attacker pulled out a knife and attacked the officer”. The officer “responded quickly, fired and neutralised the suspect”.</p> <p>The officer was hospitalised with light wounds. The assailant was a man in his 40s from the flashpoint city of Hebron, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, police said.</p> <p>There has been a rising tide of violence among Israelis and Palestinians. Four shooting, stabbing and car-ramming attacks in Israeli cities have left 14 people dead since late March. Over the same period, Israeli forces have killed 15 Palestinians, including assailants, according to an AFP tally.</p> <p>On Sunday, Israeli security forces killed a Palestinian woman who stabbed a police officer in the centre of Hebron, where about 1,000 Jewish settlers live under heavy military protection among 200,000 Palestinians.</p> <p>On the same day, the army shot and killed an unarmed Palestinian woman who they said failed to heed warning shots near the West Bank town of Bethlehem.</p> <p>Israeli forces have been rounding up suspects in the northern West Bank after a man from Jenin shot and killed three people in Tel Aviv last week.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Man threatened to kill senators; jailed 32mo.</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/alaska-senator-death-threats.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/us/alaska-senator-death-threats.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>An Alaska man who pleaded guilty to threatening to murder two U.S. senators has been sentenced to 32 months in prison and a \$5,000 fine.</p> <p>The man, Jay Allen Johnson, 65, of Delta Junction, left a total of 17 voicemails laden with threats for Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, both Alaska Republicans, federal prosecutors said. The voicemails, placed from April to September 2021, were “intended to retaliate” against the two senators for doing their work, prosecutors said.</p> <p>John E. Kuhn Jr., the U.S. attorney for the District of Alaska, said in a statement after the sentencing on Friday that nothing excused Mr. Johnson’s conduct and that threatening elected officials was “an act that attacks our very system of governance.”</p>



“The erosion of civility in our political discourse will never justify threats or acts of violence,” he said.

Jason Weiner, a lawyer for Mr. Johnson, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday.

In a sentencing memorandum, Mr. Weiner said that Mr. Johnson’s health problems after decades spent performing manual labor, along with pandemic-related “heightened turmoil” and isolation, had contributed to his behavior.

“Between the prescribed narcotics, pain, and self-medicating, Mr. Johnson was not himself,” Mr. Weiner wrote in the memorandum, dated April 1, adding that his client had learned from this experience. “His actions did not take place in a vacuum.”

Senators Murkowski and Sullivan did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Monday.

In September 2021, Mr. Johnson called Ms. Murkowski at least two times, according to court documents. In one message, he said: “I will find out everything, where you’re at. I will find out all your properties and I will burn everything you hope to have, and I will burn everything you hope to own.” He also asked her if she’d ever seen what a .50-caliber shell does to a human head.

He left Mr. Sullivan 13 voicemails, stating in one that he would get his “.50 caliber out” and then hold an online fund-raiser for the shells.

An investigation by the U.S. Capitol Police and Federal Bureau of Investigation traced the calls to Mr. Johnson, and he was arrested on Oct. 4, 2021. While executing a search warrant, F.B.I. agents also seized seven unsecured firearms illegally owned by Mr. Johnson, who has a prior felony conviction in 2016 barring him from possessing guns, prosecutors said.

In January, Mr. Johnson pleaded guilty to two counts of threatening to murder a U.S. official. In addition to his prison time and fine, he has agreed to a three-year federal protective order forbidding him to contact Ms. Murkowski and Mr. Sullivan, their families, and staff members after he is released. Mr. Johnson will also forfeit his guns.

After former President Donald J. Trump was elected in 2016, threats of violence against lawmakers surged. A Times review found clear increases of threats around Mr. Trump’s first impeachment and then after the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol last year.

There were 9,600 threats against members of Congress last year, a record that was double the previous year’s total, according to the Capitol Police. Callers have left messages detailing various methods to kill lawmakers, from hanging them to shooting them in the head.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Tacoma PD chief virtual townhall on crime</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacomas-police-chief-addresses-crime-safety-questions-in-business-townhall/281-f63bd3a9-0eb0-46a1-9e60-b527b3c7cfa8">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/tacomas-police-chief-addresses-crime-safety-questions-in-business-townhall/281-f63bd3a9-0eb0-46a1-9e60-b527b3c7cfa8</a>
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — With only a few months under his belt, Tacoma's new Chief of Police, Avery Moore, hopes the community starts to notice changes.</p> <p>"What I want to do is lessen out victims, the less victims we have the better off the city," said Chief Moore.</p> <p>During a virtual townhall put on by the Tacoma Business Council Monday night, Moore said Tacoma saw a 43 percent decrease in crime in March compared to the month before. He said for the last few weeks the</p>

	<p>department has worked to have more of a presence on Tacoma's streets. He also acknowledged the department, which would be fully staffed with a force of 362, is down about 55 officers.</p> <p>"So, what can you do to make TPD a place where people want to work," asked Tacoma Business Council President and chair Kristen Wynne.</p> <p>"So, that was probably the number one issue for me when I accepted the job. I felt I needed to start internally with morale, so I met with every officer here," responded Moore.</p> <p>The Tacoma Business Council was recently formed to bring attention to the crime problems impacting businesses. Before the virtual townhall began a video played highlighting businesses who have experienced crime and theft and are worried about the safety of their staff and customers.</p> <p>"People are frustrated and when they're frustrated when a crime happens, they call 911 but you hear they never showed," said Tacoma Business Council Communications Chair Dana Hill.</p> <p>Right now, Tacoma Police is focused on violent crime, which Moore said has a direct correlation to the property crime many businesses experience.</p> <p>Moore said the department is working to create a crime plan, which will be specific to the needs and trends in Tacoma. He plans to give an overview presentation of the plan at Tacoma City Hall next Tuesday.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Gunshots, stabbing Seattle homeless camp</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-in-serious-condition-after-stabbing-at-chinatown-id-encampment/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-in-serious-condition-after-stabbing-at-chinatown-id-encampment/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Officers found a man with serious stab wounds and seized three rifles following reports of gunshots in a Chinatown International District encampment Monday morning, according to Seattle police.</p> <p>Police received calls at around 10 a.m. about a man shooting a rifle near 13th Avenue South and South Lane Street, according to a Seattle Police Department blotter post. Officers were not able to locate the man but found a 45-year-old man with stab wounds to his arm and torso.</p> <p>Medics took the stabbing victim to Harborview Medical Center in serious condition, police said.</p> <p>Witnesses told police the victim and the woman he lives with in the encampment were not getting along with another resident, who is suspected of stabbing the man.</p> <p>The suspect, allegedly a woman in her 20s, fled up the Lane Street stairs leading to 12th Avenue South while someone else took a gun from the victim's tent and fired shots at her, police said. The shooter put the gun back in the tent and fled.</p> <p>Officers tried to search the victim's tent for firearms, but the woman he lives with refused, biting one officer in the leg and scratching a second, according to police. Both officers were treated.</p> <p>She was booked into King County Jail for third-degree assault, police said.</p> <p>Police then served a search warrant and retrieved three rifles and multiple rounds of ammunition from the tent, police said.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>04/11 Conflict in Mexico displacing thousands</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/11/mexico-displaced-people/">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/11/mexico-displaced-people/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	COAHUAYANA, Mexico — María Jesús was grilling tortillas. Patricia was frying pork ribs. Adriana was sipping a cup of tea to calm her nerves. For the Martínez sisters, that Friday was shaping up like most

Fridays in their mountain village, the women preparing lunch in their simple homes as their husbands tended the fields.

Then the women's father, Javier, sent an urgent warning: The Jalisco cartel had arrived.

"Our lives changed in a minute," said María Jesús, 31. Gunmen in four armor-plated "monster" trucks had been spotted just across the valley, Javier told his children. They grabbed their kids and ran.

Three months later, 17 family members are crammed into an abandoned restaurant here in Coahuayana, a banana-growing town on the Pacific Coast, home to an estimated 1,000 Mexicans uprooted from their communities.

As criminal groups battle for control over Mexican territory, the displaced are becoming increasingly visible, in towns such as Coahuayana and at the U.S. border. An estimated 20,000 people have fled violence in the past year in Michoacán state, roughly the size of West Virginia. Thousands more have abandoned their homes in other states like Zacatecas and Guerrero.

Forced displacement is generally associated with armed conflict — it's been a feature of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Yet it's become such a problem in ostensibly peaceful Mexico that the country's Senate is considering legislation to offer humanitarian aid to victims.

"We are at war," said Alma Griselda Valencia, a congresswoman from Michoacán who belongs to the Morena party of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. "The fact the government doesn't want to accept it, is something else."

What does Mexico's war look like? In Michoacán's Tierra Caliente region, one of the country's most violent, homes are peppered with bullet holes. Drones launch bombs that gash holes in roofs. The Jalisco cartel has planted land mines. Security officials describe the conflict as a battle between Jalisco and a rival cartel network to control the region, a hub of marijuana and methamphetamine production.

But the accounts of the displaced underscore how unconventional this war actually is. At stake are not just drug routes but timber, minerals and fruit plantations. In many cases, the armed groups have ties to local governments, business groups and the police.

Political scientist Romain Le Cour Grandmaison says displacement is a sign of the deepening crisis of violence in Mexico. "So many actors are interested in controlling territory and populations to extract resources, and to make a statement: 'I am the boss, and I have the power to displace you,' " he said.

That free-for-all reflects what may be Mexico's most critical problem. While the country has replaced its long-running authoritarian system with democracy, it has failed to build a justice system that prosecutes crime effectively.

"You can use violence for whatever interests you have in Mexico," said Le Cour Grandmaison, who runs the security program at the think tank México Evalúa. "It's a low-cost, very efficient political, economic or personal resource. It can be used with almost no judicial consequences."

Javier Martínez's butcher shop is an unlikely flash point in this war. For years he'd sold ground meat, ribs and fried pork rinds in his village in Chinicuilá municipality, a bucolic place serenaded by the cackling of chickens.

Drugs were nothing new; for years, marijuana had flourished in Michoacán's rich soil. But the illicit business began to change in the 1990s, as the grip of Mexico's one-party system waned. Drug traffickers became more organized and better-armed. They branched into cocaine and methamphetamines. Then they started to extort money from ordinary Mexicans.

Conditions got so bad that farmers in Martínez's village, Tehuantepec, were forced to pay a "tax" every time they sold a cow or a sack of corn. "We decided to rise up," said the 53-year-old butcher. Starting in 2013, thousands of Michoacán residents formed citizen militias, kicking out the brutal Knights Templar cartel. Martínez became head of his town's "self-defense" force. For a while, things were quiet.

"But now," he said, "here comes El Mencho."

That would be Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes. He leads the Jalisco New Generation cartel, which has trafficked tons of heroin, methamphetamines and fentanyl into the United States. "One of the five most dangerous transnational criminal organizations in the world," says the U.S. government. Martínez sees something else: a bunch of gunmen determined to snatch control of this region's timber supplies, iron ore mines and banana plantations.

Like the Knights Templar, the Jalisco cartel has recruited local men. Instead of cartel-vs.-cartel battles, whole villages are now swept up in the fighting.

"The targets of violence have become much broader," said Falko Ernst, senior Mexico analyst for the International Crisis Group. If one group moves into a town, he said, it not only expels its gun-toting enemies but frequently does a "social cleansing" of their relatives and other civilian supporters.

Economic and family disputes feed the chaos. When the Jalisco gunmen turned up in Tehuantepec on Dec. 3, Martínez said, they got help from some residents who were jealous of his successful butcher shop. Rival merchants, he said, "wanted to eliminate the competition."

The Martínez family fled Tehuantepec after a warning that the Jalisco cartel was targeting Javier Martínez, head of the "self-defense" force there. (Photo by Luis Antonio Rojas for The Washington Post)

The Martínez family fled Tehuantepec after a warning that the Jalisco cartel was targeting Javier Martínez, head of the... (Photo by Luis Antonio Rojas for The Washington Post)More

The gunmen torched Javier Martínez's butcher shop and home, and three other houses belonging to relatives. By the time state police arrived, the family had sped down the mountain in their pickups and a borrowed van to the coast two hours away. María Jesús said they had only one real guarantee of security:

"My father knew Teto."

Héctor Zepeda — "Comandante Teto" — is the law in Coahuayana, and a symbol of how Mexico's old security arrangements have collapsed.

Hollywood-handsome, with soft brown eyes and a sly grin, Teto became head of the local "self-defense" force in 2014, after his brother was killed by the Knights Templar. Now he leads 120 men in military-grade body armor, equipped with assault rifles.

"I don't really want to carry a weapon. None of my companions do," said the 51-year-old former auto mechanic, sitting at a rough-hewn wooden desk in front of a wall covered with pictures of fallen comrades and the Virgin of Guadalupe. "But we have to fight every day, to survive."

To many of the displaced, Comandante Teto is a hero. He's found homes for them, and given them jobs on his force. The Martínezes now live in a rundown former restaurant with a courtyard webbed with lines of drying laundry. "He even got us a refrigerator and a stove," María Jesús said.

Most of all, Comandante Teto has brought security to the town, an oasis of sea breezes and swaying banana trees, where traumatized families from other regions have packed into pastel-colored homes.

Yet it's a fragile peace. The Jalisco cartel gunmen are so close that when the "self-defense" forces patrol the town's perimeter, they can hear their enemies' voices crackling over the radio.

In a video last year, the Jalisco fighters accused Comandante Teto of working with their rivals, Carteles Unidos, a Michoacán-based crime syndicate. Teto denies the charge. The traffickers aren't the only ones making such allegations. Shortly after taking office in October, Gov. Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla pledged to disarm the "self-defense" forces in the state. They had come to represent, he said, "a sort of camouflage for illicit activities."

But the governor hasn't managed to dislodge Comandante Teto. Quite the opposite. This town of 18,000 recently issued police uniforms and credentials to the "self-defense" fighters and put dozens onto the public payroll. The 15 members of the state-recognized municipal police now serve under Comandante Teto. When two journalists recently sat down to interview Teto, the former police chief served coffee.

Mayor Gil Ruiz said many townsfolk believed that federal and state security forces were corrupt or didn't have the savvy or will to fight criminal groups effectively. In Michoacán, everyone remembers the tight embrace between the Knights Templar and many politicians and police.

"The people don't trust" the police, Ruiz said. "But the people have confidence in the self-defense forces."

Coahuayana's economic elite don't want to rely on the state security apparatus, either. The banana growers, who've enjoyed a boom under North America's free trade agreement, began bankrolling Comandante Teto's militia years ago. The mayor, a banana producer, said the force was the only alternative to the Knights Templar and their \$250-a-day "protection fees" on fruit shipments.

Longtime residents agree that the "self-defense" forces ended a terrifying period of robbery and murder under the Knights Templar. But questions swirl about exactly what role Comandante Teto's force has played in Coahuayana's unending plague of methamphetamine abuse. Teto says he has cracked down on drug sales.

"We don't know who to trust," said one woman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear for her safety. "Of course you're afraid."

Coahuayana is a rare haven in Michoacán for people who are fleeing violence. Others set their sights on the United States.

Migrant activists have noted an increasing number of Mexicans arriving at the border. While some want jobs or to reunite with family in the United States, many are fleeing the harsh rule of criminal gangs. "They were forced to leave, or forced to pay organized crime a monthly quota," said Pedro De Velasco, director of advocacy at the Kino Border Initiative, a binational migrant-assistance group. "And when they were unable to pay, they had to leave everything behind."

Stephanie Leutert, director of the Central America and Mexico Policy Initiative at the University of Texas at Austin, said there were no reliable figures on Mexicans trying to claim asylum, since the U.S. government has temporarily shut down most processing at the border, citing the coronavirus pandemic. "But it certainly is a significant population of Mexican asylum-seekers who are waiting in Mexico" for the chance to access the U.S. immigration system, she said.

López Obrador has won praise from human rights groups for recognizing the problem of the internally displaced. The lower chamber of Congress, dominated by his party, unanimously approved a bill in 2020 to register and aid people who are forced to leave home. It covers not only victims of organized crime violence but those uprooted by land disputes, religious conflicts and natural disasters. The legislation is now before the Senate.

Still, López Obrador bristled when challenged recently about front-page newspaper photos showing people fleeing Zacatecas state. "There are few, very few regions with displaced people," he told reporters. (Alejandro Encinas, undersecretary for human rights in the Government Ministry, puts the number of victims at 400,000.)

	<p>For all the administration's promises to help the displaced, it's unclear whether its security policies will do much to reduce expulsions.</p> <p>Starting in January, authorities poured more than 3,000 army and national guard troops into Michoacán to "liberate" towns controlled by organized crime groups. "We have slowly been recovering public order," the state's chief of security, army Gen. José Alfredo Ortega, told The Washington Post.</p> <p>But the Mexican government has launched military operations in Michoacán before, only to see violence resurge after troops withdraw. Le Cour Grandmaison said such war-on-drugs policies didn't address crime groups' expansion into extortion and protection rackets. "The only thing that will solve that issue is justice," he said. Police remain poorly trained, and the justice system is underfunded, politicized and veined with corruption.</p> <p>For now, the Martínez family has won a respite in Coahuayana. "But honestly, we don't feel safe," María Jesús said. Like many people in Michoacán, they have relatives in the United States.</p> <p>"We've been thinking," she said, "it would be good to put in papers to seek political asylum."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Seattle police nab teen murder suspect</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-arrest-15-year-old-wanted-in-deadly-tacoma-pot-shop-robbery-2-remain-at-large/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-police-arrest-15-year-old-wanted-in-deadly-tacoma-pot-shop-robbery-2-remain-at-large/</a>
GIST	<p>One of two juvenile suspects wanted in connection with the fatal shooting of an employee at a Tacoma marijuana store in March was arrested by Seattle police in Kent on Monday, less than a week after he and two accomplices allegedly committed a smash-and-grab, takeover robbery at a West Seattle jewelry store, according to Seattle police.</p> <p>The 15-year-old boy was arrested by robbery detectives outside the Maleng Regional Justice Center in Kent, said Sgt. Randy Huserik. He was turned over to Tacoma police and booked into Remann Hall Juvenile Detention Center, according to Huserik and Officer Wendy Haddow, a Tacoma police spokesperson.</p> <p>On March 24, Pierce County prosecutors charged the 15-year-old boy and Montrell Hatfield, 16, with first-degree murder in connection with the March 19 fatal shooting of Jordan Brown, 29, during an armed robbery at World of Weed on East Portland Avenue in Tacoma, court records show. A third suspect, who acted as a lookout during the robbery, has yet to be identified.</p> <p>Hatfield remains at large. He is described as a Black male, 5-feet-5, 130 pounds with black hair and brown eyes, and a prosthetic right leg that causes him to walk with a limp, according to Pierce County prosecutors. Anyone with information about his whereabouts is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or 911.</p> <p>All three are suspected of committing at least 10 armed robberies in Pierce and King counties in recent months, according to the charges filed in the Tacoma murder case.</p> <p>The 15-year-old and Hatfield were charged in King County Juvenile Court in February in connection with an armed robbery at a Federal Way pawnshop, but were released from detention and placed on electronic home monitoring over objections from prosecutors, said Casey McNerthney, a spokesman for Prosecutor Dan Satterberg. Both cut off their monitoring devices on March 16 and warrants were issued for their arrests, McNerthney said.</p> <p>The Seattle Times does not typically name juvenile defendants unless they are charged as adults.</p> <p>Under state law, 16- and 17-year-olds can automatically be charged as adults for serious violent crimes like first-degree murder and first-degree rape. For teens younger than 16, prosecutors can request what is</p>



known as a decline hearing and a judge ultimately decides whether to keep the case in juvenile court or decline juvenile jurisdiction and transfer the case to adult court.

It wasn't immediately clear on Monday whether Pierce County prosecutors have requested a decline hearing for the 15-year-old in the murder case.

In 2018, [first-degree robbery](#) was among a handful of crimes that were removed from the list of what are known as auto-decline offenses and extended juvenile jurisdiction for those specific crimes from age 21 to age 25.

The two boys are suspects in the Feb. 22 robbery of Elite Pawn, located in the 29100 block of Pacific Highway South in Federal Way. The owner called 911 just before 3:30 p.m. to report a robbery in progress, say the charges filed in King County Juvenile Court.

Federal Way police arrived and learned three male suspects had just driven off in a vehicle, say the charges. From witness statements and video footage, detectives determined three armed suspects entered the store and ordered employees and customers onto the floor. One of the suspects forced the store's manager to the safe, where the manager put \$20,000 in cash and jewelry into a bag the suspect provided, the charges say.

Meanwhile, the suspect later identified as the 15-year-old fired a round into a wall and forced an employee to empty the till, placing \$10,000 into a plastic bag the teen provided, charging papers say.

As the three suspects drove away, a customer fired a gun at the fleeing vehicle, which crashed into another car but continued north on Pacific Highway South. Police found the abandoned car at a park-and-ride lot a mile away and witnesses told officers that the suspects had fled into a nearby apartment complex, the charges say.

Hatfield and the 15-year-old were arrested and police recovered \$24,000 in cash and 98 pieces of jewelry, the charges say. The third suspect evaded capture.

At their first court appearance on Feb. 24, Chief Juvenile Judge Averil Rothrock ordered Hatfield and the 15-year-old released on electronic home detention, court records show.

Just after 10 p.m. on March 19, Tacoma police responded to a report of an [armed robbery and shooting at World of Weed](#), where they found an employee unresponsive with a gunshot wound to the neck, say the Pierce County charges. He died at the scene.

Based on witness statements and video surveillance footage, police learned two suspects entered the store, ordered everyone to the floor, and provided plastic bags to employees, the charges say.

One of the suspects, later identified as Hatfield, fired a warning shot into the ceiling and got into a fight with an employee, grappling with him on the floor, say the charges. At that point, the second suspect — later identified as the 15-year-old — leaned over the counter and fired a round, hitting the employee in the throat, according to charging papers.

The two suspects and a third suspect who had acted as a lookout apparently drove off in a Chevrolet Monte Carlo, say the charges.

During the investigation, Tacoma police detectives discovered there were ongoing investigations into a string of marijuana dispensary robberies in King and Pierce counties and that the modus operandi was the same in all of them, say the charges.

Around 5:20 p.m. Wednesday, three armed suspects entered Bellevue Rare Coins in the West Seattle Junction and ordered employees to lie down on the floor, according to Huserik and [an incident](#)

	<p><a href="#">report</a> posted to the Seattle Police Department's online blotter. They made off with \$12,000 and several pieces of jewelry, according to police.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 KCSO: murder suspect fled to Kenya</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-accused-of-fatal-shooting-at-redmond-area-airbnb-fled-to-kenya-detectives-say/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-accused-of-fatal-shooting-at-redmond-area-airbnb-fled-to-kenya-detectives-say/</a>
GIST	<p>King County prosecutors have charged a 19-year-old man with premeditated first-degree murder in connection with a fatal shooting at a horse farm east of Redmond in December.</p> <p>A warrant has been issued for the arrest of Mohamed Abdikadir, who purchased a one-way ticket to Nairobi, Kenya four days after he is accused of killing 20-year-old Deandre Meredith on Dec. 11, according to charging documents. When King County sheriff's detectives attempted to arrest Abdikadir on Jan. 25, they learned he had flown to the east African nation on Christmas Day, say the charges filed Friday.</p> <p>Abdikadir's last known address is in Burien. It is unknown if he is a Kenyan national, said Capt. Tim Meyer, a sheriff's spokesman.</p> <p>Kenya has an extradition treaty with the U.S. and sheriff's officials and prosecutors have initiated what Meyer described as "a very long process" to effect Abdikadir's extradition back to the U.S. King County prosecutors have asked that he be held in lieu of \$5 million bail.</p> <p>The owners of a nearly 20-acre horse farm in the 18800 block of Northeast 106th Street rent out a double-wide, manufactured house on the property through Airbnb, according to the charges and King County property records.</p> <p>The house was rented on Dec. 11 for a birthday party and Meredith and Abdikadir were among the attendees. Around 10 p.m., the two men got into a fight over Meredith's handgun and the charges say Meredith's friends joined in the the beating of Abdikadir. During the beating, he was thrown against an oven, shattering the glass window.</p> <p>Abdikadir ran outside and was chased by the group, the charges say. They caught up to him and continued the beating before it was eventually broken up and Abdikadir ran to a parked car.</p> <p>Meredith then argued with one of Abdikadir's friends over a cellphone while holding a gun, though it wasn't pointed at anyone, say the charges. Moments later, a shot rang out and Meredith fell to the ground. As he lay wounded, Abdikadir stood over him and fired multiple times before leaving in a Toyota Camry, according to charging papers.</p> <p>Other partygoers called 911 and some of them later identified Abdikadir as the gunman. Meredith, who was shot approximately six times, died soon after arriving at Seattle's Harborview Medical Center, the charges say.</p> <p>The Camry, which Abdikadir had left in, was found stuck in the mud between paddocks behind the horse barn. The Camry and another vehicle were towed away pending search warrants, according to the charges.</p> <p>The day after the shooting, a man matching Abdikadir's physical appearance showed up at the tow yard, telling staff he had tracked his cellphone to the business, the charges say. He attempted to persuade employees to let him retrieve his phone but was turned away.</p> <p>Sheriff's detectives later seized two cellphones from the impounded vehicles and determined that only one of them was capable of emitting a signal that could allow it to be tracked to the tow yard, according</p>

	to the charges. A forensic exam showed that phone belonged to Abdikadir and it had been remotely wiped, the charges say.
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Arrest: teen in Tacoma murder, robberies</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260326355.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article260326355.html</a>
GIST	<p>A 15-year-old wanted by Tacoma police for a string of armed robberies and a killing that occurred last month during a cannabis shop robbery in the city's Eastside neighborhood was arrested Monday by Seattle police.</p> <p>The teenager was arrested in Kent outside the Maleng Regional Justice Center, according to a news release from Tacoma Police Department. He and 16-year-old Montrell Hatfield — who has yet to be apprehended — were charged March 24 with first-degree murder and second-degree unlawful possession of a firearm. The News Tribune typically does not publish the names of juveniles charged with crimes but is naming Hatfield because he is charged as an adult in Pierce County Superior Court.</p> <p>The 15-year-old was transported to Remann Hall Juvenile Detention Center and booked for investigation of first-degree murder. It has not yet been determined whether he will be charged as a juvenile or an adult, but Pierce County Prosecuting Attorney's Office spokesperson Adam Faber said prosecutors will seek to charge the teenager as an adult.</p> <p>The pair are suspected in at least 10 armed robberies at pot shops in Pierce and King counties. Police said Hatfield is considered to be armed and dangerous. Anyone with information on his whereabouts was asked to call 911 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS. Montrell Hatfield, 16, and a 15-year-old boy are wanted for a fatal shooting at a Tacoma pot shop on East Portland Avenue on March 19, 2022.</p> <p>The deadly pot shop robbery occurred March 19 at a business in the 3200 block of Portland Avenue. Police responded just after 10 p.m. that night when dispatchers received calls regarding an armed robbery there.</p> <p>When police arrived, they found an employee who had been shot and who was declared dead on the scene.</p> <p>The Pierce County medical examiner later identified the victim as 29-year-old Jordan Brown. The robbery occurred three days after the teens cut off home detention monitoring devices they were ordered to wear for home detention following their arrest for allegedly robbing a pawn shop in Federal Way.</p> <p>Video from surveillance cameras showed a person, later identified as Hatfield, fighting Brown after the victim tossed back a trash bag he had been ordered to fill with cash, according to charging documents. The teenager arrested Monday allegedly broke up the fight by shooting Brown in the neck, and the teens ran out the door.</p> <p>After interviewing witnesses and reviewing video from surveillance cameras, Tacoma police began to suspect the robbers were the same people involved in a string of pot shop robberies with similar circumstances in King and Pierce Counties.</p> <p>Detectives noticed Hatfield had an "oddity" in his gait, and footage showed a prosthetic leg beneath his pants as he fought with Brown. Upon reviewing surveillance video from other pot shop robberies, detectives discovered the suspects fit the same description and occasionally wore the same clothing.</p> <p>Police were able to identify the teens because they were arrested Feb. 22 after allegedly robbing a Federal Way pawn shop. They were released from jail and placed on home detention.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Shooting each other wearing body armor</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/us/florida-teen-body-armor-shooting/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/us/florida-teen-body-armor-shooting/index.html</a>

GIST	<p>(CNN)One teenager is dead after at least two teens took turns shooting at each other while wearing body armor, police in Belleview, Florida, said.</p> <p>On April 3, the Belleview Police Department (BPD) received a call for a shooting at a residence. When they arrived, they found 16-year-old Christopher Leroy Broad Jr., who had been shot. He was transported to a local hospital where he died, <a href="#">BPD said in a Facebook post</a>.</p> <p>The medical examiner's office said the cause of Broad's death was a single gunshot wound to the chest and the manner of death was listed as homicide, according to a probable cause affidavit.</p> <p>During the investigation into the shooting, BPD "discovered evidence to prove" that Joshua Vining, 17, had "shot and killed Broad." Vining was arrested Thursday and charged with aggravated manslaughter of a child with a firearm, BPD said.</p> <p>"Through the investigation, it was determined that Vining and Broad were taking turns shooting at each other while wearing a vest which contained a form of body armor," BPD said in the statement. "Vining shot at Broad while he was wearing the vest and he was struck."</p> <p>Police said when they arrived, they found Vining doing CPR on Broad, according to the probable cause affidavit.</p> <p>A second teenager gave police misleading information about the incident and was charged with providing false information to law enforcement, BPD said.</p> <p>In the affidavit, police say a third teenager told them he "video recorded both shootings using Snapchat on his iPhone," saving the video of Vining being shot, but deleting the video of Broad being shot. A technician was able to recover the shooting of Broad, according to the affidavit.</p> <p>Both Vining and the second teen facing charges for providing false information to law enforcement are being charged as adults, police noted.</p> <p>CNN has not able to determine if either have legal representation at this time and could not reach them for comment.</p> <p>Vining <a href="#">posted a \$30,000 bond</a> on April 8, according to the Marion County Sheriff's Office inmate search website.</p> <p>The second teen charged was released on a \$1,000 surety bond on April 8, according to the county inmate search.</p> <p>Belleview is located roughly 65 miles northwest of Orlando.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Mexico: gunmen kill family of 8</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mexico-family-8-killed-4-children-tultepec/">https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mexico-family-8-killed-4-children-tultepec/</a>
GIST	<p>Gunmen burst into a home just north of Mexico City and killed eight members of a family, including four children, as the country continues to be plagued by a wave of brutal violence.</p> <p>Prosecutors in the <a href="#">State of Mexico</a>, which borders the capital, said the shootings occurred in the township of Tultepec. The shootings happened between late Sunday and early Monday. Seven people died at the scene, and one woman died later at a hospital.</p> <p>There was no immediate information on a possible motive. Tultepec is known for its fireworks workshops, both legal and illegal, and it's notorious for <a href="#">deadly fireworks accidents</a>.</p>

The latest violence in Mexico comes as President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on Sunday easily won a divisive referendum he promoted on whether he should step down or complete his term — an election marked by low turnout.

López Obrador took office in 2018 championing a "hugs not bullets" strategy to tackle violent crime at its roots by fighting poverty and inequality with social programs, rather than with the army.

But Mexico continues to see brazen mass killings across the country.

Earlier this month, at least three people were [killed](#) in a shooting and a subsequent chase by police officers at a beachside restaurant in Mexico's Pacific coast resort of Acapulco.

That shooting came just days after the [severed heads of six men](#) were discovered on top of a Volkswagen in the town of Chilapa de Alvarez, in Guerrero state.

Last month, 20 people were shot dead at a [venue used to host cockfights](#) in the town of Las Tinajas, in Michoacán state. An [American mother](#), Melissa Silva, was among the victims.

Also in March, gunmen killed nine people in an attack on a house in central Mexico — an ["execution" of six men and three women](#) that shook a middle-class area of the usually peaceful town of Atlixco.

And authorities in Michoacán said a [suspected massacre of about a dozen men](#) seen lined up against a wall by drug cartel gunmen in February may have been a shootout between rival factions of the same cartel.

Across the country, more than 340,000 people have been killed in a wave of bloodshed since the government deployed the army to fight drug cartels in 2006.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Former cop found guilty Jan 6 riot role</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-officer-stormed-capitol-jan-guilty-counts/story?id=84021808">https://abcnews.go.com/US/police-officer-stormed-capitol-jan-guilty-counts/story?id=84021808</a>
GIST	<p>A former police officer who stormed the Capitol during the Jan. 6 insurrection was found guilty Monday by a jury on all six counts.</p> <p>Thomas Robertson was found guilty on charges ranging from obstruction of an official proceeding to entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds with a dangerous weapon. This is the second jury case for a Capitol rioter.</p> <p>Monday marked day five of a trial that spanned hours of Jan. 6 video footage, first-hand accounts from Capitol and Metro police officers and an inside look at how FBI agents handled the arrest of both Robertson and former colleague and close friend Jacob Fracker, who testified against Robertson as part of his own plea agreement for storming the Capitol.</p> <p>The jury deliberated for about 15 hours in a trial that focused on very specific details of Robertson's actions — from where he stood to what he was holding.</p> <p>Robertson entered the restricted area of the Capitol with the goal of obstructing the electoral vote, the jury found. He used a wooden stick to push past an officer, which was ruled it could be used as a dangerous weapon.</p> <p>"Many people in this country disagreed with the outcome of the presidential election," a U.S. attorney said during opening arguments last Tuesday. "Many people use, and continue to use, strong language to express their political views. But the defendant, he is not on trial for beliefs — he is on trial for his actions."</p>

Shortly after he found out about the warrant for his arrest, Robertson destroyed his phone along with Fracker's, saying in a message, "anything that may have been problematic has been destroyed, including my phone," prosecutors said during the trial.

That also means he could have corrupted two official proceedings, the jury found – either the Electoral College voting process or his own federal trial, or both.

Robertson's lawyers said he was invited into the Capitol by an officer, stayed for only 10 minutes and didn't assault anyone or cause any damage. The defense brought in two witnesses who each took the stand for less than 8 minutes.

"He entered, he retrieved, he departed," one of Robertson's lawyers said on day one of the trial. "That's what this case is about."

The U.S. attorney's office brought in nine witnesses, who oftentimes took the stand for over an hour.

One of those witnesses was Fracker, who stormed the Capitol with Robertson. He agreed to testify as part of his plea agreement. He said during the trial he did this in part to lower his sentence.

The jury deliberated for five hours last Friday after closing arguments. Judge Christopher R. Cooper read the decision Monday.

Robertson was found guilty of obstruction of an official proceeding; obstructing officers during a civil disorder; entering or remaining in a restricted building or grounds with a dangerous weapon; disorderly and disruptive conduct in a restricted building or grounds with a dangerous weapon; disorderly conduct in a capitol building and obstruction of an official proceeding.

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HEADLINE	<b>04/11 Administration new regulation ghost guns</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/politics/gun-regulation-atf-steve-dettelbach/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/11/politics/gun-regulation-atf-steve-dettelbach/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>CNN — President Joe Biden announced a new firearm regulation Monday meant to contain the use of privately made weapons as he comes under pressure to take more steps to address a national crisis of gun violence.</p> <p>The regulation on so-called “ghost guns” – unregulated, untraceable weapons made from kits – will address a critical gap in the government’s ability to track them by requiring background checks before purchase and serial numbers on some of the components. Though ghost guns make up a relatively small share of the guns recovered by law enforcement, they have been seen with increasing frequency in recent years.</p> <p>Biden brought one of the kits to the Rose Garden on Monday, declaring the new rules “basic common sense” before holding aloft one of the weapons made from the gear.</p> <p>“If you buy a couch you have to assemble, it’s still a couch. If you order a package like this one over here that includes that parts that you need and directs the assembly of a functioning firearm, you bought a gun,” he declared, striding over to the kit and demonstrating the ease of constructing the weapon.</p> <p>“It doesn’t take very long,” he said. “Anyone can order it in the mail.”</p> <p>Biden also named Steve Dettelbach, a former US attorney from Ohio, as his nominee to lead the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The President’s previous nominee was forced to withdraw amid opposition in the Senate.</p> <p>“This mission of this agency isn’t controversial – it’s public safety,” Biden said.</p> <p>What you should know about ghost guns, ahead of Biden's expected announcement on new regulations</p>



The moves came as gun violence and crime have ticked up in the United States, putting pressure on the White House to take action. A rash of shootings over the weekend underscored the emergency: Four people, including two teens, were shot shortly after a Major League Baseball game in Washington, DC, on Saturday night, police said. In Illinois, six people were found injured after a shooting occurred in a residential neighborhood.

Police are also investigating a shooting at a birthday party in Indianapolis where six people were shot and one person was killed. And two people were also killed and 10 hospitalized after a “targeted attack” at a Cedar Rapids nightclub, police say.

Routine deadly gun violence is a uniquely American problem. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention deemed gun violence a “serious public health threat” last year. Biden has made modest progress on gun control, but major steps like banning assault weapons or closing background check loopholes would require congressional action.

“None of this absolves Congress ... for the responsibility to act,” Biden said.

Gun violence traditionally spikes in the summer months, lending further urgency to Monday’s actions.

The new rule issued by the Justice Department seeks to rein in a type of weapon that has been seen more and more at crime scenes across the country. Ghost gun kits can be purchased online, and a weapon can be self-manufactured in as little as 30 minutes. Because regulators cannot trace them, ghost guns are appealing to criminals and those with criminal histories, according to officials.

The new rules require anyone purchasing a kit to undergo a background check, as is required for other types of firearm purchases. It also requires those selling the kits to mark components with a serial number, so the eventual weapon produced can be traced. And it mandates firearm dealers add a serial number to already built ghost guns they come across in their businesses.

“All of a sudden, it’s no longer a ghost,” Biden said of the new rules. “It has a return address. And it’s going to help save lives, reduce crime and get more criminals off the streets.”

“Ghost guns look like a gun, they shoot like a gun, and they kill like a gun, but up until now they haven’t been regulated like a gun,” John Feinblatt, president of Everytown for Gun Safety, said in a statement celebrating the Biden administration for “doubling down on its commitment to gun safety.”

Mia Tretta, who was shot and wounded with a ghost gun in a school shooting in California in 2019, similarly praised the administration for taking “a critical step” with the new regulation. Tretta introduced the President in the Rose Garden on Monday.

“If you can put together an IKEA dresser, you can build a ghost gun,” she said in a statement.

“Unfortunately, it is that easy to get a weapon that has not only changed my life but has done the same thing to thousands of others. Finalizing this rule is a critical step to making sure no one else has to go through what my family has had to go through.”

The Justice Department previously launched a national ghost gun enforcement initiative, which will “train a national cadre of prosecutors and disseminate investigation and prosecution tools to help bring cases against those who use ghost guns to commit crimes,” according to the White House.

Biden said Monday that those who commit a crime using a ghost gun should “expect federal prosecution.”

“This rule is an important step. It is going to make a difference, I promise you,” Biden said.

Ghost guns have been used in multiple recent shootings, including at a Maryland high school in January. The exact number in circulation is unknowable, given the inability of regulators to track them.

Between 2016 and 2021, the ATF received 45,000 reports of privately made firearms recovered by law enforcement, including 692 from homicides or attempted homicides. The agency was able to trace only 1% of them, officials said, because the firearms lack serial numbers.

Maryland joins 10 states and DC becoming latest to place restrictions on ghost guns  
Multiple states have moved to restrict their sale as ghost guns become more common at crime scenes.

Last week, Maryland joined Washington, DC, and 10 other states – California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Virginia and Washington – in banning or restricting the purchase or use of ghost guns, which are often bought online and assembled at home.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer again decried the use of ghost guns during a press conference Sunday, calling for a crackdown on the rise of the privately made firearms and speaking about a deadly shooting in the Bronx Friday.

The New York Democrat blamed Republicans for holding up gun reform legislation, while pressing Biden’s administration to go further. “Today I am calling on the administration to go all after ghost guns, by putting out regulations that will stop them. The federal government has the ability through regulation to stop these ghost guns,” he said.

Still, Biden’s planned firearm regulation drew backlash from gun rights advocates even before being officially announced.

Aidan Johnston, the director of federal affairs for Gun Owners of America, said in a statement Sunday, “Biden’s proposal to create a comprehensive national gun registry and end the online sale of gun parts without the passage of a new law exemplifies his disregard for the Second Amendment.”

In September, Biden withdrew his nomination of David Chipman to lead the ATF after facing opposition from Republicans and certain moderate Democrats.

Chipman, a former career official at ATF, came under scrutiny from gun rights supporters and the National Rifle Association for his work as a senior adviser to Everytown for Gun Safety and Giffords – the organization started by former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot at an event in her Arizona district in 2011.

Dettelbach ran unsuccessfully for Ohio attorney general in 2018 after serving as US attorney in the state.

“We will be working hard to ensure that Steve Dettelbach receives the fair hearing and confirmation that he deserves. He should be a noncontroversial candidate because he has a long record of working in law enforcement and for the public safety of the people of Ohio and the American people,” one of the officials said.

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